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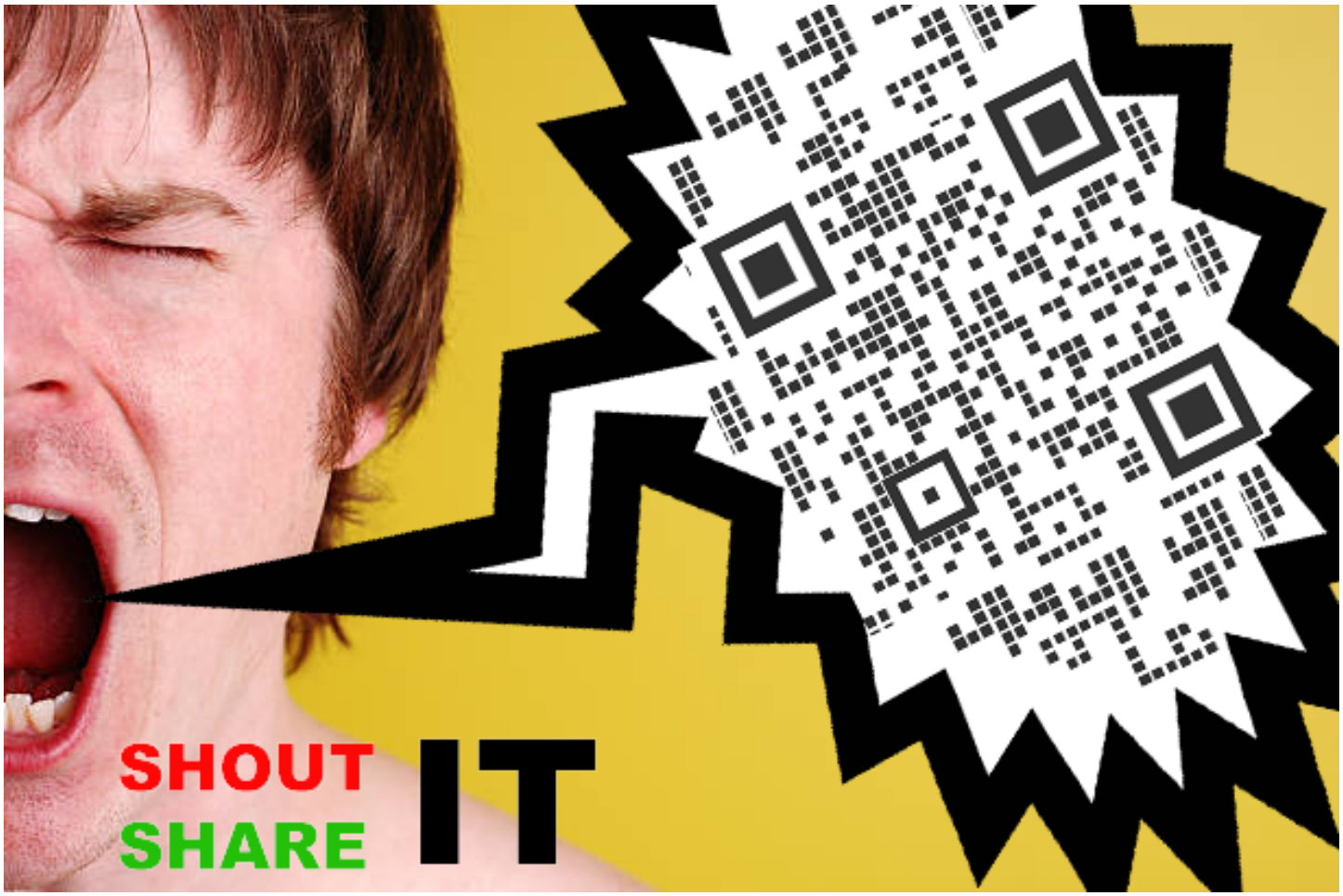
A HISTORY OF TAMIL LITERATURE

C. JESUDASAN and HEPHZIBAH JESUDASAN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A HISTORY OF TAMIL LITERATURE

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DEDICATED TO

ALL WHO BELIEVE

IN THE ETERNAL VALUES OF LIFE

OF UNIVERSAL MAN

SONNET

He plays with balls in interstellar space;
Collapses mighty kingdoms; crumbles spheres;
Vaults over oceans; over the length of years;
Changes the fashions in the world's ways;
Till, fevered with his sport through endless days,
Soul-dusty, soiled with ancient doubts and fears,
Home comes the truant boy, weary to tears,
Looking for mother-love, asking for grace.

Ah Man! Your heart, that's yet not plucked away,
Is flesh and blood, though you may play with stone;
And all the secrets of the life you've known,
Lie in its mighty throbs you hear all day.
Listen! Those throbs are yours, that ancient man
Has left behind in rhyme for you to scan.

HEPHZIBAH JESUDASAN

PREFACE

THE AVAILABLE histories of Tamil literature, such as they are, are devoted mainly to the chronology of authors and their works. Myths associated with the names of ancient poets are often brought up as circumstantial evidence for serious consideration as literary history. It is easy to understand this, because the greatest difficulties about such an ancient literature are the decision of the dates and the unravelling of myths from facts. While early South Indian history itself has not been fixed in a proper chronological setting, it is no wonder that these authors had enough on their hands discussing the historical problems of the literature. Much water has flowed under the bridge, and even though several vital chronological problems still remain unsolved, it is not necessary now to make a history of Tamil literature merely a history of dates. We are in a position to concentrate on the literary aspect of the subject.

There are many books in Tamil and in English bearing on individual poets and individual works, limited periods and certain aspects of Tamil literature. But among the fairly complete histories of Tamil literature, the following names may be mentioned. The late Mr. Pūraṇaliṅgam Piḷḷai has written two books on the subject, one being an elaboration of the other. Unfortunately he is pre-occupied with myth, and we find the book to be a catalogue of literary names without much chronological sense. Yet we must remember that he was a pioneer in the field, and some of his observations are really stimulating. The late Prof. K. Subramaṇia Piḷḷai's book in Tamil on the subject is not much of an improvement on the above attempt. There is a want

of the sense of proportion, to the extent of giving about half the book to the Sangam classics and barely five pages to Kamban̲. Nor is he greatly concerned with the literary values of the works as much as with a catalogue of the works and their synopsis. Mr. Selvanāyagam of Jaffna has written in Tamil what we consider a fairly good history of Tamil literature. He places greater emphasis on the historical background and the literary trends than individual works and authors. But this is in fact necessitated by the scope of the work which is after all too brief. His *History of Tamil Literature*, it must be mentioned, is easily the best of all available histories of Tamil literature. But for these Tamil does not have, to our knowledge, a complete history of its literature properly so called, if we may except a few monographs on the subject. Today we find many attempts being made at histories of Tamil literature from diverse quarters, but we have not yet been able to make use of all of them.

Numerous works exist, however, dealing with limited periods, special aspects, and isolated works, of Tamil literature. We have them in both Tamil and English. Of the works dealing with limited periods, we may mention Mr. K. Srīnivāsa Piḷḷai's *Tamiḻ Varalāṟu*, the *Aṇṇāmalai University Series*, Mr. Sōmasundara Dēsihar's histories of Tamil poets, Mr. A. V. Subramaṇia Aiyar's book on modern Tamil literature and Prof. Vaiyāpuri Piḷḷai's *History of Tamil Language and Literature*, *Kāviyakālām* etc. But Prof. Vaiyāpuri Piḷḷai's are the most thought-provoking and readable, though he too is mainly concerned with dates, his conclusions on which are generally based on linguistic foundation alone. Mr. V. S. Cheṅgalvarāya Piḷḷai has written on Tamil prose, and some idea of Tamil prosody can be had from Dr.

A. Chidambaranāthaṉ Cheṭṭiyar's book on the subject. Mr. A. V. Subramaṇia Aiyar's book on the Sittar poets is stimulating reading, and Mr. Sīṇi Vēṅgaḍasāmi gives us plenty of valuable information in his works *Kiṛistavamum Tamiḻum* and *Pauttamum Tamiḻum*. We have also several valuable studies on isolated Tamil works in English such as V. V. S. Aiyar's study of *Kambarāmāyaṇam*, the Rev. Pope's study of *Tiruvāsaham*, *Nāladiyār* and the *Kuṛaḷ* and the Rev. Popley's priceless study of the *Kuṛal*. It is to a few English works like these that the outside world owes whatever knowledge it possesses about Tamil literature. In Tamil Prof. T. P. Mīṇākshisundaram's works on Vaḷḷuvar, and Dr. Rājamāṇikkam's work on *Periya-purāṇam* are commendable.

We propose here to attempt a short history of Tamil literature from the earliest known period down to the middle of the twentieth century. We are primarily concerned with the literature proper, discussing dates only where inevitable. In matters of chronology we have followed generally accepted opinions, making deviation only where we felt absolutely justified in doing so. So far as the literature is concerned, the opinions expressed here are mainly ours, though, of course, we have been guided and stimulated by existing trends of thought.

We ourselves have not been fully satisfied with the work. We have a painful feeling that our work itself does not show a very good sense of proportion. The Sangam Period, for instance, might reasonably have been given a dozen pages or so more. In particular, the interesting background, with the social and political conditions, of the Golden Age of the Tamils could have been given. But we started the work on an estimate of two hundred pages. The later Tamil poets have more or less made away with the estimate. A few more of

the Sangam poems, especially from *Puṟa-nāṉūṟu* would have been in place here. Yet it is a comfort to reflect that the Sangam poets do resemble each other so much in method, that, though of the four hundred and sixty and odd authors we have mentioned only seven, these seven poets might fairly be taken as samples of the entire formidable array of Sangam talents.

We would like to say that suggestions from the readers would be always welcome. We do not claim that anything that is expressed here cannot be shaken. Dates, for instance, of the early periods, particularly of *Tolkāppiyam*, cannot claim to have been settled once for all, and are subject to change as new research works turn up.

We hereby specially acknowledge our indebtedness to the following authors: Mr. Selvanāyagam of Jaffna, the late Prof. Vaiyāpuri Piḷḷai, the late Mr. Sadāsiva Paṇḍārattār, the late Mr. Sōmasundara Dēsihar and the late Prof. M. Rāghava Aiyaṅgār. I take this opportunity here of remembering my beloved *guru* and guide the late Prof. K. Subramaṇia Piḷḷai with gratitude and reverence, particularly with reference to the apprenticeship I served under him when he was revising the second edition of his history of Tamil literature. He was the one who kindled first in me the desire to undertake a work of this kind, though I was not able to fulfil it during his lifetime.

Though my wife and I have been cherishing this ambition in our minds now for a long time, and preparing for it by reading ahead, the immediate stimulus for undertaking it together was given to us by Sri S. P. Appasamy who proposed to publish a history of Tamil literature under the auspices of the Y.M.C.A's of India and Ceylon in the Heritage of India Series. Our thanks are due to him for this. We consider it an honour and

a privilege on the one hand to be entrusted with a work of such importance, while on the other hand, we have been conscious of a tremendous responsibility. How far we have fulfilled it, the reader must decide, but I hope that he will remember to be charitable in view of the difficulties which beset a work of this kind.

Trivandrum,
17-12-1960.

C. JESUDASAN

INTRODUCTION

With trepidation and a feeling of inadequacy we embarked on this task. A real history of Tamil literature should be treated as the work of a lifetime by its authors, and not, as in the present case, the work of a few years. Yet we have ventured to submit this work out of our sheer desire to introduce to the world a too long unknown treasury of great literature. To translate the words of our own greatest poet, 'As though a cat should venture to lap the ocean of milk dry', we have attempted to bring within the narrow bounds of this book the entire vast range of the literature of the Tamils. Through sheer necessity we have had to minimise date-discussions, and practically to ignore all third-rate work of which there is of course plenty in Tamil. Grammars and commentaries have had the same fate. Nor could we spare much thought for philosophical work. We have had to confine ourselves more or less to the literature of power in Tamil and devote our attention to quality rather than volume. Of course in matters of judgment we are aware that we are guided by lights that we might not fully share with the whole of the Tamil world. Yet we have sought to be true to our lights, and we are aware that no man can seek more. We have not sufficient self-confidence to attempt to assess living writers, and hence we dare not bring our history of literature right into the modern age, though we have endeavoured to delineate recent literary trends.

Tamil literature is like no other Indian literature. We are not so much concerned about its antiquity as about its achievement, though Tamil bears the sole and sacred literary record of the ancient Dravidian stock of India

before it was dominated by Aryan influence. Perhaps that is the reason why it stands in such sharp contrast to Sanskrit and the Sanskrit dominated languages of India. If the entire people of India are made up chiefly of the Aryan and Dravidian races, and the predominantly literary language of the Aryans is Sanskrit, the predominantly literary language of the Dravidians is Tamil. Does the rest of India have any idea of what Drāviḍa, as Tamil is called in Sanskrit, is like? If they seek to know, they shall find that it is not a literature of barbarians. In moral tone, while it is far more liberal and open than Sanskrit, it reveals the touching faith a people had in goodness through the ages. They will find something akin to it in English literature, with the difference, of course, that Tamil prose is still only in the making, and what we have called here the *History of Tamil Literature* is practically the history of Tamil poetry. For the poets themselves, we shall come across the best of them in this work. Let them speak for themselves. The time may come when the English language shall bridge the gulf between the Tamils and the entire world, and the ancient Tamil poets shall be mentioned along with the Greeks and the Romans. Till the time comes, of course, we have to rest content.

Perhaps it would be true to say that Tamil is the one ancient language of India that bears the reflection of the life of the people, and not merely the aristocracy, of the past. The whole gamut of human experience is here. The tragic and the sublime are not infrequently touched. Laughter, though not very pronounced, is not unknown. True, through how many centuries, how many processes, Tamil must have passed before it finally attained the dignity of a literary language, we are not in a position to speculate upon. We come quite suddenly upon a finished

literature, a literature that is no promise, but an achievement. And this literature had become itself absolutely without the help of Sanskrit. This is what no other Indian literature can boast of. And in later centuries, even while Sanskrit had been welcomed or thrust into Tamil literature, the best in Tamil had always been self-reliant. In the following pages we trace the history of a great literature through a long and checkered career down to its decline, from which it is but seeking to revive itself at present.

Unlike all other Indian literatures, what stands out among the achievements of the Tamils is, emphatically, not from the Sanskrit. There is the delicate and sensitive treatment accorded by the Sangam poets to Nature and human feelings; the lofty and refined thinking of Vaḷḷuvar on the fundamental values of life, crystallised into priceless little gems; the delicate brush of Iḷaṅgō that painted the power of a woman; the lyricism of Māṇikka-vāsahar; the unerring and relentless probing of Kambaṉ into human nature, even while he treats it with awe and reverence; the apparently artless graces of the sweet story-teller Puhaḻēndi; the spiritual agony of Paṭṭiṉattār; the vision of God as Tāyumāṉavar had it at times; the sorrowful philosophy of Avvai, the singer-for-gruel; the pathetic strains of wandering bards; the sublimity of some of the prayers of Irāmaliṅga Suvāmihaḷ. These gifts are their very own, not taken from the Sanskrit, not even exactly indigenous, but belonging only to the authors, and made very beautiful in the garb of poetry. Sophisticated and Sanskritised literature, so far as Tamil is concerned, has to be relegated to the second class, even though it is plentiful, and it is the first-class literature that we are chiefly concerned with here. And in the first-class literature, in Tamil,

more than elsewhere, the dignity of the common man stands out supreme.

The glimpses that the world has had of the realm of Tamil literature are due mainly to the efforts of Christian missionaries like Father Beschi, the Rev. Pope and the Rev. Popley. But theirs was only the pioneer work of heroic men. It remains for us to carry it on and map the unexplored regions of a dead past. We have simply endeavoured here to supply an outline. It is for others to fill in the interesting details. Our outline map itself, we are well aware, will be subjected to change. But all early maps are subject to change. We are only anxious to receive hints and suggestions to set right our impressions as far as possible. We claim no infallibility. Nor do we believe ourselves to be superhuman beings and therefore free from all bias. Yet we have sought, with all our strength and ability, to put before the reader the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth about the story of Tamil literature as we know it. For we are convinced that no man can have any sound idea of India's past unless he studies Tamil literature, or what is left of Dravidian civilization, side by side with Sanskrit literature.

In the name of the dear Master, then, Who has made life worth living for us, even in this age of anarchic and atheistic tendencies, we present to the English-knowing reader, as briefly as possible, as faithfully as we can, all that we are in a position to know about the great literature of the Tamils.

Trivandrum, HEPHZIBAH JESUDASAN
17-12-1960.

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I. THE BEGINNINGS

Pre-Tolkappiyam Literature

THE TAMIL language is yet young. There is room for growth, development and maturity. There may be decades more for the language to realise in itself the elasticity of English prose. There is room still for the literature of the Tamils to strike root in the dramatic life of the masses, and find new sustenance from hard realities. But the Tamil language is also very, very old. It is as old as the beginnings of the Chēra, Chōḷa, Pāṇḍya dynasties in South India, far older than the Christian era. It is older, indeed, than any other language that is not dead, so old that its beginnings seem an entirely different world, a world separated from us by a whole chaos of myth and legend. It is no wonder that the inheritors of the wealth of centuries should, in the age of research and reason, strive to ascertain the extent of their cultural heritage. But we find it certainly a baffling, if fascinating, endeavour, to trace the progress of an ancient people's mind down to the present day, beginning from its earliest literary records. And so we have to take these records first into consideration.

Where shall we place them? We dare not trust our judgment to tradition, for never was a more hopeless mess of patriotic zeal, imagination and want of regard for facts. We would certainly not place our Tolkāppiyar and our renowned Saṅgam poets, our ancient 'nest of singing birds', anywhere around 10,000 B.C. We are glad to say that, if we did, nobody would believe us. We are coming to face facts more honestly. It is an encouraging trend of modern times, that we can at least boast possession of our senses.

To decide the age of the earliest Tamil literature, we

will consider the evidence of some of the sober materials in our possession. Among the North Indian sources, Kātyāyana's *Vārttika* on Pāṇini, of the fourth century B.C., is the earliest. It makes mention of the Pāṇḍya, Chōḷa and Kērala countries.[1] The edicts of Aśōka of the next century refer to the Chōḷa, Pāṇḍya, Satyaputa and Kēralaputa[2]. A century or so later king Khāravela of Kaliṅga claims to have defeated the Dramiḍa confederacy[3]. All this information only shows that the Tamil country was politically advanced even before the time of Christ. It does not however help us to decide the date of the ancient Tamil literature.

In South India also, there are some old inscriptions available, which are assigned roughly, on paleographical grounds, to the third century B.C.[4] Though they are the earliest records of the Tamil country, it should be remembered that they are found in the caves of Buddhist monks, themselves probably of foreign origin. The language of these inscriptions is Tamil and Prākrit. The script is Brāhmī, but we observe the presence of non-Brāhmī symbols for 'ḍa', 'ma' and 'ḷa'. It is not unlikely that there existed a Tamil with a language and script of its own even then. But, if we argue that the highly finished literature of the early Tamils, as we know it, developed both its language and its script from what we find represented in the inscriptions, the process would have taken several centuries. Under the circumstances, the inscriptions too are no sure guide to the date.

Tolkāppiyam, which is said to be the earliest extant work in Tamil, gives us some clue to the beginnings of Tamil literature, though the date of the work itself is not settled beyond doubt. *Tolkāppiyam* has literally

[1] Sāstri, K. A. N., *History of South India*, p. 65. [2] Ibid, p. 82.
[3] Ibid, p. 85. [4] *Tamil Culture*, V. 2, p. 175.

translated the passage on the classification of compounds from Patanjali's *Mahābhāshya*[1]. Patanjali's date is around 150 B.C.[2] This sets therefore the upper limit to the date of *Tolkāppiyam*. But the latest date assigned to it is the fifth century A.D. on the ground that it is indebted to the *Manusmriti*, Kauṭilya's *Arthasāstra*, Bharata's *Nāṭya-sāstra* and Vātsyāyana's *Kāmasūtra*[3]. This is questionable. *Tolkāppiyam*, for instance, is said to have borrowed the 'daśāvasthas', 'ten stages in the state of love', from the *Kāmasūtra*. But actually it speaks of only nine stages[4], the order and significance of which are also not in keeping with the *Kāmasūtra*. However, the Saṅgam literature enables us to fix, more or less, the latest limit of the work. The major portion of the Saṅgam literature can be assigned to the second century A.D.[5] In *Madurai-k-kāñci*, which is included in the Saṅgam classics, Pāṇḍiyaṉ Neḍuñceḷiyaṉ is addressed as a descendent of Pāṇḍiyaṉ Nilandanda Neḍiyōṉ. Probably the latter is the same as Nilandaru Tiruviṉ Pāṇḍiyaṉ in whose court *Tolkāppiyam* got approved. The language of the work also argues for it a date earlier than the Saṅgam literature. A few instances of the linguistic differences are cited here. Words like 'vēr'[6], 'āḍu'[7] and 'āṟu'[8] found first in the Saṅgam literature, are obviously derived from the words 'viyar'[9], 'yāḍu'[10] and 'yāṟu'[11]. Besides, some words used in *Tolkāppiyam* suffer change of meaning when they come down to the Saṅgam literature. For instance, 'tuñcal' in the former means 'to sleep'[12]; but in the latter, 'to die'

[1] Vaiyāpuri Piḷḷai, *Hist. of Tamil Lang. and Lit.* p. 14. [2] Keith, *History of Sanskrit Literature*, p. 5. [3] Vaiyāpuri Piḷḷai, *Hist. of Tamil Lang. and Lit.* p. 14. [4] *Tolkāppiyam, Poruḷ*, 100. [5] Vide p. 13 of this book. [6] *Porunarāṟṟuppaḍai*, l. 80. [7] *Puṟanānūṟu*, 229. [8] *Neḍunalvāḍai*, l. 30. [9] *Tolkāppiyam, Poruḷ*, 260 and 261. [10] Ibid, 619. [11] Ibid, 191. [12] Ibid, 260.

also[1]. In *Tolkāppiyam*, 'kavarvu' means 'to desire'[2]; but in *Paṭṭinappālai* it means 'to eat'[3]. *Tolkāppiyam* states the meaning of the word 'el' to be 'light'[4]; but, *Malaipaḍukaḍām* uses the word in the sense of 'night',[5] and so on. Honorific plurals, allowed by *Tolkāppiyam* only in the spoken language,[6] have, by the time of the Saṅgam works, passed into literary usage.[7] The usage of the particles of simile, prescribed in *Tolkāppiyam*, is relaxed in the latter[8]. Since a literature following a grammar may choose to add its own rules, while he reverse is not possible, the differences definitely argue an earlier date for the grammar. The political and social backgrounds of both the *Tolkāppiyam* and the Saṅgam works being the same, they could not have been separated by a very wide gap of time. We will not be far wrong, therefore, if we assign *Tolkāppiyam* to about the first century A.D.

Curiously enough, *Tolkāppiyam* happens to be a grammatical treatise, and as such it cannot be the first work in Tamil. There might have been an earlier literature from which it should have deduced its rules. *Tolkāppiyam* itself refers to two types of compositions, one having line restriction and the other, none[9]. The first type is pure poetry. The subject-matter of the poems is mainly love and war, treated under many stages, different phases and various moods, against appropriate backgrounds of landscape and time. Each poem is complete in itself, representing the utterance of a character placed in a dramatic situation. The poems employ the technique of suggestion, inference and tonal modulations to make the readers understand the import and evoke in them the required

[1] *Padiṟṟuppattu*, 72, l. 8. [2] *Sol.* 362. [3] l. 22. [4] *Sol.* 269. [5] l. 416. [6] *Sol.* 27. [7] *Aiṅguṟunūṟu*, 431-440. [8] Veṅkaṭarājulu Reḍḍiyār, *Kabilar*, pp. 104-105. [9] *Tolkāppiyam, Poruḷ*, 476.

emotions[1]. This, in general, is the main type of composition available before the time of *Tolkāppiyam*. The work also seems to suggest, in addition to these poems, the existence of narrative poems[2]. In all these literary forms six kinds of metres were employed: 1. *veṇbā*, 2. *āśiriyam*, 3. *kali*, 4. *vañci*, 5. *maruḷ* and 6. *paripāḍal*, some of them being supposed to be suited to certain themes only[3]. Under the second type, i.e. compositions with no line restriction, we have 1. grammatical literature, 2. commentaries to grammar, 3. prose interspersed with poems, 4. fables, 5. humorous hits, 6. riddles, 7. proverbs, 8. incantations and 9. specialisations in suggestiveness[4]. It is quite clear that earlier grammatical works have been made use of by the author of *Tolkāppiyam*[5].

Tolkappiyam

Tolkāppiyam bears testimony to its indebtedness to Sanskrit. The prefatory verse to the work says that the author is well-versed in *Aindiram*. In the classification of words into four parts of speech, *Tolkāppiyam* seems to have followed Sanskrit[6]. There is clear evidence of Sanskrit influence in the chapter on cases. Not only principles relating to grammar but technical terms like *sūttiram*, *paḍalam*, *piṇḍam* etc., were borrowed[7].

While in a grammar book we normally expect the study of letters, words and sentence-structure, strangely enough, *Tolkāppiyam* includes the study of the subject-matter of literature also. In the first section, the author deals with letters, their names, production, combination etc. In

[1] *Tol. Poruḷ*, 313. [2] Ibid, 549-553. [3] Ibid, 433, 450, 472 etc. [4] Ibid, 477 and 485. [5] *Tol, Eḻuttu*, 1, 3 etc. [6] *Hist. of Tamil Lang. and Lit.* p. 67. [7] Ibid, p. 68.

the second section, he deals with the parts of speech, cases, syntax etc. In the third, i.e., the section on subject-matter, he considers love and war, the recognised forms of verse bodying forth these subjects, and so on. On the whole *Tolkāppiyam* contains about 1610 rules in *nūṛpā* metre which resembles *āśiriyam*.

Tolkāppiyam shows a remarkable knowledge of language. The treatment of the arrangement of consonants in words seems to be an original contribution of the author and is a study by itself[1]. It is interesting to note that the author of the work has some idea about the linguistic geography of the Tamil country. There was the area called the Sendamiḻ land where standard Tamil was spoken, and adjoining this were twelve dialectal areas[2]. But in the matter of the division of the sections of the book into subsections, the author seems to have been carried away by a sense of symmetry[3]. For instance, the three sections of the work are divided into nine subsections each, which is quite unnatural. Very often the *nūṛpās* are ambiguous in spite of their apparent simplicity of language. *Tolkāppiyam* is also not remarkable for brevity, an essential quality in a grammatical work.

We know nothing positive about the author, Tolkāppiyar, except his work. He is said to be one Tiraṇadūmākkiṇi, the son of a Brahmin sage Jamadagni[4] and one of the twelve disciples of Sage Ahattiyar. There is a theory that he was a Jain from South Travancore[5]. It is said that he wrote his grammar on the model of his master's work *Ahattiyam*[6] and that he and his fellow-students produced in collaboration another grammatical work

[1] *Hist. of Tamil Lang. and Lit.* p. 67. [2] *Tol. Sol.* 398 and 400. [3] Pūraṇalingam Piḷḷai, *Tamil Literature*, p. 24. [4] *Naccinārkiniyar's Commentary, Tol.* prefatory verse. [5] *Hist. of Tamil Lang. and Lit.* p. 66. [6] *Naccinārkiniyar's Commentary, Tol.* prefatory verse.

Pannirupaḍalam[1]. But several extant verses with which his master and his companions are credited have been found to be spurious[2]. Obviously this has nothing to do with the Tolkāppiyar with whom we are concerned.

But of the early Tamil works, the grammar is the one in which we are least interested. The body of literature, known as the Saṅgam works, will be considered in the next chapter.

[1] The prefatory verse, *Puṟapporuḷ Veṇbā Mālai.*
[2] *Hist. of Tamil Lang. and Lit.* pp. 63 and 72.

II. THE SANGAM PERIOD

The Sangam

THE TITLE 'the Saṅgam Period' is misleading. It owes its origin to a story suggested first in the seventh century A.D.,[1] and fully developed later[2]. The story is this. There were three Saṅgams or assemblies of poets founded by the Pāṇḍya kings. The seat of the first was in the now submerged Southern Madura. It lasted for 4440 years. Gods and sages had enrolled themselves as members of this learned body. The second Saṅgam was shifted to Kapāṭapuram where it continued for 3700 years. By this time the gods seem to have bidden farewell to the Saṅgam, leaving behind one or two sages to take care of it. But, Kapāṭapuram also had to be vacated because of the inroads of the sea and the third Saṅgam was started in modern Madura. Now, ordinary human beings were in full possession of the field. Naturally, this Saṅgam could live only for 1850 years. The story gathered more moss in course of time. We are told that there was a Saṅgam-plank to test the worth of new works. It would shrink to reject any unworthy material, but would accommodate any work fit to be passed[3].

All this stuff, in this age of reason, is dismissed briefly. It only remains for us to find out if there had existed anything with the semblance of a Saṅgam. There could not have been one in Madura under the Pāṇḍyas. It would not have accepted and approved the poems of Kabilar who speaks slightingly of the Pāṇḍyas[4] Madura is one of the ancient cities of Tamilnad and several descriptions of it are available in the so-called Saṅgam works,

[1] Appar, *Tiruppuṭṭūr Tāṇḍaham*, St. 3. [2] *Iṟaiyanār Ahapporuḷ*, Ed. Namaśivāya Mudaliyār, pp. 8 and 9. [3] Nambi, *Tiruviḷaiyāḍal-Purāṇam*, chap. 15. [4] *Puṟanānūṟu*, 110.

as well as in *Silappadihāram*, which comes slightly later. The poets who are so particular about immortalising their patrons could not have been silent over such an assembly had it existed. It is likely that the story of the Saṅgam arose as a counterpart of the Dramiḍa Saṅgha in Madura founded by the Jains in the fifth century A.D.[1] The important part played by Madura in the growth of Tamil literature might have lent support to the story. The uniformity of style of the so-called Saṅgam literature certainly bespeaks a general understanding among the scholars of the times. But such an understanding, while there was the patronage of kings and chieftains sincerely interested in their language, and while travel was quite an ordinary event for bards, is perfectly credible even without the existence of an official body like the Saṅgam. But since the tradition of the Saṅgam started so early as the seventh century A.D., and since we, anyway, require a name for the period, we will give it the commonly accepted name, the Saṅgam Period, for the sake of convenience.

Date of Sangam Literature

The date of the Saṅgam period is still disputed. The duration of this period is yet to be settled. For this, we have to work on existing data, and they are few. Legend and the enthusiasm of devotees to the language would only lead us to absurd conclusions. We may depend on such internal evidence n the literature as points to historical facts borne out by inscriptions and foreign accounts. We may also depend upon information deduced from a scientific study of the language used by the Saṅgam poets.

From the data in the Vēḷvikkuḍi grant we calculate that towards the close of the sixth century A.D., Kaḍuṅgōṉ reconquered the Pāṇḍya territory from the Kalabhras[2].

[1] P.T.S., *History of the Tamils*, p. 247. [2] Ibid, p. 535.

The Kalabhras, we find, had been in possession of the kingdom for several generations[1]. The former Pāṇḍyas, the heroes of Saṅgam literature, therefore, must have had it prior to the Kalabhras. We can set them at least as far back as the fifth century A.D. In Saṅgam literature, there are references to trade with the Greeks, to the seaports in the Tamil country and the imports and exports[2]. Greek works of the first two centuries of the Christian era corroborate this information[3]. Roman coins minted in the first five centuries A.D. have been discovered in the Tamil country[4]. Obviously, that was the time when trade with the Roman empire flourished in Tamilnad, and Saṅgam literature, we find, comes within this fruitful and prosperous period.

A philological study of Saṅgam poetry would not overthrow this view. Without giving us any specific date, it places the language of Saṅgam poetry at an appreciable distance in time from the language of the *Dēvāram* of the seventh century A.D. Saṅgam 'aindu'[5] is *Dēvāram* 'añcu'[6]; Saṅgam 'yāṉ' is *Dēvāram* 'nāṉ',[7]; 'i', the demonstrative adjective of the Saṅgam, is 'inda' in *Dēvāram*[8]; Saṅgam poetry does not have the double plural of *Dēvāram*[9]; the participial ending 'āl' of *Dēvāram*[10] is completely absent in the Saṅgam poetry; the present tense particle 'kiṉṟu', a rarity in Saṅgam literature, abounds in *Dēvāram*[11]— to cite a few examples. The difference, apart from a complete change in diction, idiom and prosody, emphasizes the point that Saṅgam literature must have

[1] *Sendamiḻ*, XXI, pp. 256 and 257. [2] *Ahanānūṟu*, 149; *Puṟanānūṟu*, 56; *Paṭṭinappālai* ll. 185-193. [3] P.T.S. *History of the Tamils*, pp. 301-321. [4] Kanakasabhai Piḷḷai, *The Tamils 1800 Years Ago*, p. 38. [5] *Puṟanānūṟu*, 37. [6] Sambandar, *Padiham* 237:4. [7] Appar, *Padiham* 305: 1-10. [8] Sambandar, *Padiham* 4: 11. [9] Sambandar, *Padiham* 2: 9 and 10. [10] Sambandar, *Padiham* 5:9. [11] Sambandar, *Padiham* 3:3 and 4; *Padiham* 235: 1 etc.

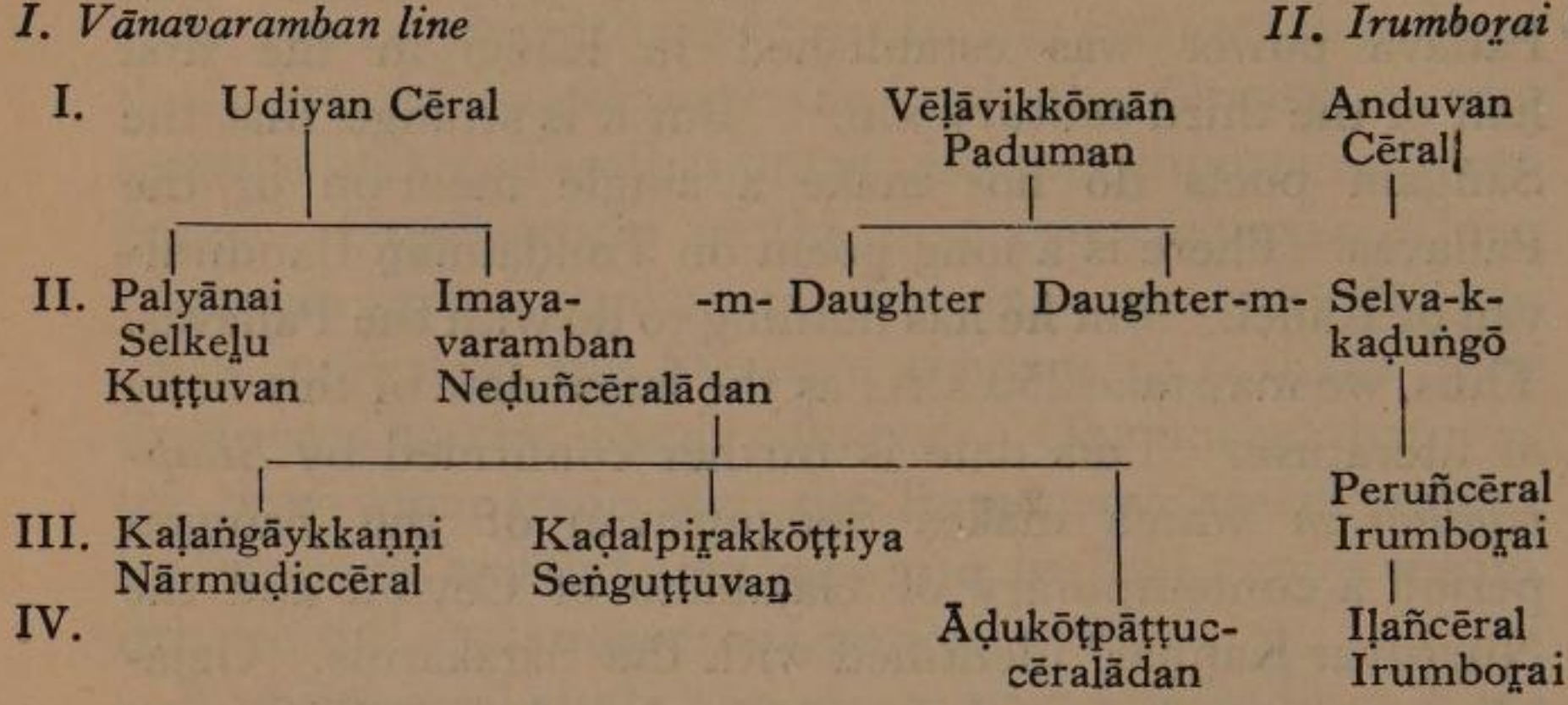
been several centuries prior to the *Dēvāram* of the seventh century.

But five hundred years is too broad a period for the Saṅgam literature. Where shall we fix it then? The Pallava power was established in Kāñci in the first half of the third century A.D.[1] But it is strange that the Saṅgam poets do not make a single mention of the Pallavas. There is a long poem on Toṇḍaimāṉ Iḷandiraiyaṉ of Kāñci. But he has nothing to do with the Pallavas. Thus, we may take 250 A.D., as the latest date of this body of literature. This date is further confirmed by *Silappadihāram* which makes Seṅguṭṭuvaṉ of the Saṅgam period a contemporary of Gajabāhu of Ceylon and the Nūṟṟuvar Kaṉṉar[2] identified with the Sātakarṇis. Gajabāhu seems to have ruled over Ceylon from 171 A.D., to 193 A.D.[3] It is a strange coincidence that there were also the Sātakarṇis in the same period, their power coming to a close in the beginning of the third century A.D.[4] The Saṅgam works, therefore, may be assigned to a period prior to 250 A.D., including within it the last quarter of the second century A.D.

We will now make an attempt to find out the duration of the Saṅgam period. For this we have to depend on the poems and their colophons. According to the Samājam edition, the total number of Saṅgam poems is 2389, including the invocatory pieces. But *Kalittohai* and *Paripāḍal* and perhaps the invocations too can be shown to be later works. Eliminating them, we are left with 2199 poems of which 979 can be unhesitatingly assigned to a period of not more than five generations. How so, can be substantiated below. The colophons to

[1] Dubreuil, G. J., *The Pallavas*, p. 10. [2] *Silappadihāram*, 30: 160; 26:163. [3] Wilhelm Geiger, *Trans. of the Mahāvaṃsa*, Intr. p. 38. [4] Sāstri, K. A. N., *History of S. India*, p. 88.

Padiṟṟuppattu help us to deduce two collateral lines of Chēra kings mentioned in those poems. These lines cover four generations.



But there are reasons to think that there were more than four generations. *Padiṟṟuppattu* consists of ten tens composed in honour of ten kings. Of these, we have the middle eight intact. We may guess that the first was in honour of Udiyaṉ Cēral and the last, of Iḷañcēral's successor. But there is no positive evidence for this. Still, allowing room for this more than possibility, we will have to concede roughly five generations to Saṅgam literature.

This theory is based on the colophons to *Padiṟṟuppattu*. It is pleasantly confirmed by ạ study of the poets themselves, though such a study cannot bring perfectly accurate results. One of the Saṅgam poets is called Tolkabilar[1], meaning the older Kabilar. There is another poet Kaḷāttalaiyār who is referred to by Kabilar as having flourished in the past[2]. We will therefore place Tolkabilar and Kaḷāttalaiyār a generation before Kabilar. The poetess Avvai alludes to Pāri, the patron and friend

[1] Colophon to *Ahanānūṟu*, 282 etc. [2] *Puṟanānūṟu*, 202:11-13.

of Kabilar, in the past[1]. There goes, at least, another generation. A study of the patrons of the three poets Kaḷāttalai, Kabilar and Avvai would show that, as all these three are not distinctly separated by an appreciable distance in time, they would not fit into more than three generations. After Avvai, we may reckon yet another generation. We find Peruñcittiraṉār, singing of Kumaṇaṉ after the death of Eḷiṉi, the patron of Avvai[2].

Since the two deductions are parallel, we may dare to assign the 979 poems to roughly four or five generations. In some way or other these poems are connected either with these four or five generations of Chēra kings or their contemporary Chōḷas, Pāṉḍyas or chieftains. 252 poems can be added to them on the ground that they contain references to personages of this period and that they were composed during the time of, or before Ukkirapperuvaḷudi, who was responsible for the compilation of *Ahanānūṟu*, and who, very likely, was the patron of Avvai[3]. Since Ukkirapperuvaḷudi might be identified with the patron of Avvai, and since Mudukuḍumi Peruvaḷudi flourished before Neḍuñceḷiyaṉ[4], another set o 308 poems can be assigned to this period or earlier. Another 208 poems composed by Pēyaṉār and Ōdalāndaiyār will have to go with the previous list, because 200 poems out of this 208 are included in *Aiṅguṟunūṟu* compiled by Kūḍalūr Kiḷār of this period. Thus, out of 2199 poems, only 452 give no positive clue as to their period. Yet, their resemblance to the majority in point of style, diction and general tone is remarkable.

More than half the period of the five generations may go to the second century A.D., as Seṅguṭṭuvaṉ of the third generation is said to be a contemporary of Gajabāhu

[1] *Ahanānūṟu*, 303:9-14. [2] *Puṟanānūṟu*, 158:9. [3] Colophon to *Puṟanānūṟu*, 367. [4] *Maduraikkāñci*, l. 759.

of the last quarter of that century. And the rest may extend over to the first half of the third century. But, of course, we will have to make allowance for a margin of a few decades.

Sangam Literature

Now, we must have a glance at the Saṅgam literature in general before passing on to its most conspicuous talents. The metre employed on the main is *āśiriyam* occasionally relieved by *vañci* as in *Paṭṭiṉappālai*. The entire body of literature is grouped into 1. *Pattuppāṭṭu* or the Ten Idylls and 2. *Eṭṭuttohai* or the Eight Anthologies of which six alone will come under this period. The Ten Idylls, running to 3550 lines, may be arranged in the following chronological order:

1. *Porunarāṟṟuppaḍai* by Muḍattāmakkaṇṇiyār on Karikālaṉ, contemporary of Kaḷāttalaiyār.
2. *Paṭṭinappālai* by Uruttiraṅgaṇṇaṉār on Karikālaṉ.
3. *Perumbāṇāṟṟuppaḍai* by Uruttiraṅgaṇṇaṉār on Toṇḍaimāṉ Iḷandiraiyaṉ of Kāñci.
4. *Kuriñcippāṭṭu* by Kabilar who refers to Kaḷāttalaiyār in the past and who is a contemporary of Paraṇar.
5. *Mullaippāṭṭu* by Nappūdaṉār who, as well as Nakkīrar, refers to the Yavaṉas.
6. *Neḍunalvāḍai* by Nakkīrar on Neḍuñceḷiyaṉ.
7. *Tirumuruhāṟṟuppaḍai* by Nakkīrar.
8. *Madurai-k-kāñci* by Māṅguḍi Marudaṉār on Neḍuñceḷiyaṉ.
9. *Malaipaḍu-kaḍām* by Peruṅgouśihaṉ on Naṉṉaṉ, son of Naṉṉaṉ, referred to by Māṅguḍi Marudaṉār.
10. *Siṟupāṇāṟṟuppaḍai* by Naṟṟattaṉār on Nalḷiyakkōḍaṉ who lived after Pāri, Kāri, Ōri etc.

The six anthologies, of which two are known to have been compiled during the Saṅgam period, also may be arranged, in the order of compilation, as follows:

1. *Ahanānūṟu:* a collection of 400 love-poems of thirteen to thirty-one lines each, compiled under the patronage of Pāṇḍiyaṉ Ukkirap-peruvaḻudi, the contemporary of Avvai.
2. *Aiṅguṟunūṟu:* a collection of 500 love-poems of three to six lines each, compiled under the patronage of Māndaraṉ Cēral Irumboṟai, contemporary of Neḍuñceḻiyaṉ.
3. *Padiṟṟuppattu:* a collection of 100 poems consisting of ten equal sections, each being composed by a poet in praise of a Chēra king.
4. *Kuṟundohai:* a collection of 401 love-poems of four to eight lines each, compiled by Pūrikkō.
5. *Naṟṟiṇai:* a collection of 400 love-poems of nine to twelve lines each, compiled under the patronage of Pāṇḍiyaṉ Māṟaṉ Vaḻudi.
6. *Puṟanānūṟu:* a collection of 400 poems on *Puṟam* themes, each of four to forty lines.

That does not in any way mean that these are all the poems of the period, now extant. We have reasons to include a few poems from *Puṟattiraṭṭu* and some others cited as examples in early commentaries.

Aham and *puṟam*, i.e., love-poetry and war-poetry, are the two broad divisions of Saṅgam literature. This classification is of pure Tamil origin. Those were days when love and war must have been the chief interests of the young and the active, Tamilnad being under several kings and countless chieftains who did not care much for peace. Naturally, very definite ideas of honour and

chivalry must have sprung up, balanced by love. Indeed, what age of chivalry is there when love did not claim its rights beside war? The trends of the literature were thus controlled and guided by the circumstances of the day, though subjected to rather rigid literary conventions.

Of the two divisions, *aham* monopolises the major portion of the Saṅgam literature. The life of a couple of lovers is given its setting in time and place[1] and its natural background[2], and then the details of the conduct[3] of the lovers are worked out. These are, in order, given the names *mudal*, *karu* and *uri*. We can trace out the life of lovers running through the whole gamut of experiences so provided by the system, from the bloom of the first fresh passion in the greenwood of *kuṟiñci*, through the pain of partings in early wedded life in *pālai*, the patient waiting of the lone woman in *mullai*, the longing, agonised waiting of the woman in '*neidal*', down to the entry of infidelity into the scene of mature love and quiet domestic happiness in *marudam*. Into this structure the whole variety of experiences may be fitted, with provision, of course, for variations[4].

Puṟam is chiefly concerned with the feats of the tribal days. The names of the divisions, *veṭci*, *vañci* etc., indicate the flowers worn by the parties concerned. *Veṭci*, the first division, presents the daring feat of capturing cattle from enemy territory and also the daring recapture of the prize by its former owners. *Vañci* is the taking up of the offensive in anticipation of aggression. *Uḻiñai*, takes us to a more sophisticated phase of warfare, the attack and defence of a fort. *Tumbai* moves into the heart of the battlefield where opposing forces meet. *Vāhai* deals with the military glory of kings. *Kañci* is the

[1] *mudal.* [2] *karu.* [3] *uri.* [4] *kaikkiḷai* and *perundiṇai* are the remaining two aspects of *Ahaṃ*.

natural step next to these worldly glories—the reflection on their instability. *Pāḍāṇ* deals with the glories of the patrons.

This, in brief, is the conventional framework as given in *Tolkāppiyam*. Into this we expect the details of Saṅgam poetry to fit. But the Saṅgam poets are not absolute sticklers for tradition. They have allowed some free play to their imagination, so much so that a few rules had to be formulated later as in *Iṟaiyanār Kaḷaviyal* and *Pannirupaḍalam* to accommodate these deviations[1].

Paranar

Of the 461 poets who are represented in the Saṅgam literature the four major poets are these in order of time: Paraṇar, Kabilar, Avvai and Nakkīrar. These four are the Big Four of the Saṅgam period. Next to them in talent come the authors of *Mullaippāṭṭu* and *Paṭṭinappālai*, two of the three most beautiful poems in *Pattuppāṭṭu*, the other being *Neḍunalvāḍai*. No study of Saṅgam literature can afford to ignore these.

Paraṇar's name is first on the list. Of all the Saṅgam poets Paraṇar is the one most closely associated with Kabilar's name. Kabilar and Paraṇar are mentioned in one breath in the Tamil world just as Keats and Shelley, and Tennyson and Browning go together in English literature. All the myths about Paraṇar introduce him to us as one of the great trio of Saṅgam literature, the other two being Kabilar and Nakkīrar[2]. Both Kabilar and Paraṇar have left verses addressed to the chieftain Pēhaṉ, beseeching him to go back to his forlorn wife[3]. Paraṇar seems to have enjoyed a very long life and was actually senior to Kabilar. He sings of Iḷañceṭceṉṉi[4],

[1] *A Hist. of Tamil Lit., Tolkāppiyam*, pp. 12 and 44. [2] *Kaḍamba-vana Purāṇam* etc. [3] *Puṟanānūṟu*, 143, 144 and 145. [4] Ibid, 4.

his son Karikālaṉ,[1] contemporary of Neḍuñcēralādaṉ, and Seṅguṭṭuvaṉ[2], Neḍuñceralādaṉ's son. But Paraṇar's life has left no recognisable marks on his literature like Kabilar's, apart from a great many objective references to chieftains and kings, which do not point to any particular conclusion. For the myths, they have no place in a work of this kind.

Paraṇar's references, indeed, are a deal too many and too elaborate, making the poems look top-heavy. These references become epic similes thrust into short poems, though they may be beautiful when detached from the context. The story of Ādimandi, bewailing the loss of her husband, is quite touching in one piece:

> 'Like Ādimandi widowed, who with eyes
> Brimming with tears, went mourning o'er her loss,
> Through every land, and through every town,
> Demanding who had seen her curly-haired,
> If ocean took him, or if the river hid?'[3]

Paraṇar attempts a variety of love-themes, but he does not make them always interesting. Still, sometimes, Paraṇar does remind us of his greater contemporary Kabilar. When he says, for example,

> '. . . . the new flowers fall
> Like the close-falling raindrops'[4], or,
>
> 'Love breaks through shyness, like floods not to be
> By barriers of salt'[5], [stayed

one could hardly detect the difference. Paraṇar also has his fund of wonderful similes.

> 'The broad and long-stalked lotus leaf, upborne
> Upon the water, keeps waving like the ears

[1] *Ahanānūṟu*, 246. [2] *Padiṟṟuppattu*, 41-50. [3] *Ahanānūṟu*, 236.
[4] Ibid, 236. [5] Ibid, 208.

Of the mighty elephant, with every wind
That stirs the azure depths.'[1]
Or, still more wonderful, the pallor of the beloved is like the persistent moss on the surface of the pool, which

'With every touch gives way,
And back with each estrangement spreads.'[2]

We will take an image from Paraṇar's poetry as an illustration of the symbolism which is one of the pronounced features of Saṅgam literature:

'To eat the silver fish, the stork, as though
Afraid its steps were audible, moves soft,
Like a burglar entering a guarded house.'[3]

This is a reflection on the character of the faithless lover, in whose country such deceit is practised.

Here is a very interesting piece of Paraṇar's, in which the heroine unburdens her problems to her confidante:

'Though it were not a festival, the town
Of revellers will hardly go to sleep;
Though all the busy streets might chance to rest,
My sharp-tongued mother still keeps wakeful watch;
Though she, too-cautious guardian, choose to doze,
The sleepless sentries run their midnight rounds;
And if the sworded sentinels but chance
To sleep, the watchful dog will wake and bark;
If the noisy dog take rest, like broad daylight
The moon stays in the heavens to spread its rays;
And if, one day, all these are hushed, then he,
Not firm enough at heart, comes not to me!'[4]

Paraṇar is extremely fond of parallelism. Indeed, it is to this device chiefly that several of the most beautiful of his poems owe their beauty. One of his *puṟam* poems

[1] Ibid, 186. [2] *Kuṟundohai*, 399. [3] *Ahanānūṟu*, 276. [4] Ibid, 122.

deals with the havoc caused by Iḷañcēṭceṉṉi in the battlefield. Its effect is heightened by parallel statements, contrasted at the end with the abject suffering in enemy territory:

'Hence like the motherless and hungry child,
Unceasing wails the country of thy foe!'[1]

Even in his *puṟam* poems Paraṇar submerges his personality in conventions. Still he manages to compose a really fine elegy[2]. The effect, however, is not due to the personal note, but the long vowels rhyming at the end of alternate lines and the subtle metrical arrangement beginning with pairs of long-drawn-out, end-stopped lines, and ending with short run-on lines, as though the poet were gasping for breath.

There is no doubt that Paraṇar is a true, perhaps a great poet. But there seems to be no justification for ranking him beside Kabilar. In Paraṇar, there are several vulnerable spots. He does not show a high dramatic sense, he is not consistently musical, his allusions are often provokingly tiresome and his flashes of imagery are certainly not so abundant or always as rich as Kabilar's. Besides, his personality is completely submerged in the conventions of his day. But, there are, all the same, flashes of greatness in him, flashes neither few nor far between, and to affirm that Paraṇar is not Kabilar is not to deny him his well-earned place in Tamil literature.

Kabilar

The most important name on the list is, of course, Kabilar. In bulk, as well as in quality, his verse stands out. He is represented liberally in all the Saṅgam anthologies. He is the author of 206 poems. Contemporary

[1] *Puṟanānūṟu*, 4. [2] Ibid, 63.

references to Kabilar are several and full of love and respect. 'Renowned Kabilar, in learning great, of silver tongue.'[1]—that is the impression he made on them. Of his life, we do not know much beside what we elicit from his writings. There is nothing to prove the myth that he was one of the neglected children of a Brahmin father and a Pulaya mother[2]. Ample material, however, is available about his later life, especially in his *puṟam* poems.

He shows close acquaintance with several of the chieftains and kings of Tamilnad. Chief among them were the immortal Pāri and the Chēra king Selvākkaduṅgō-vāḻiyādaṉ. Kabilar's name cannot be separated from Pāri's. Pāri was not merely Kabilar's friend and patron, he was an inspiration to him. Kabilar found this man of bounty, 'Pāri Vēḷ, more yielding-soft than water'.[3] The attachment to Pāri extended also to Pāri's mountain, mountain-springs and the flowers that bloom in their waters[4]. Kabilar did not desert his beloved patron when misfortunes overtook him. When Pāri's prosperous territory was besieged by the three Tamil kings, Kabilar shouted down his challenge at them[5]. He told them that if they really wanted Pāri's country, they should come, not as warriors, but as minstrels[6]. However, it was not the poet who was to decide the battle. Pāri was killed. Kabilar found himself burdened with Pāri's two daughters, whom he had probably tutored, with a very genuine poetical gift. It was his sacred duty to entrust them to suitable husbands before he himself was free to follow Pāri. Two chieftains, to whom Kabilar took the girls, refused to marry them[7], quite naturally, since they must have been

[1] Ibid, 53. [2] *Ñānāmirdam* (old edit.) p. 70. [3] *Puṟanānūṟu*, 105.
[4] Ibid, 114, 115, 109 and 116. [5] Ibid, 110. [6] Ibid, 109.
[7] Ibid, 200, 201 and 202.

poor matches in the world's eye. Leaving them under the care of some Brahmins, Kabilar approached Selvakkaḍuṅgō for patronage[1]. After some time he came back and succeeded, after all, in giving away the girls to Malaiyar. It is said, he leaped into the flames to meet his beloved patron and friend Pāri in the next world[2].

Kabilar's *puṟam* poems are especially interesting for the light they throw on his life. He takes it on himself to preach morals to the chieftain who had neglected his wife for some other fancy[3]. Applying in dire need to Selvakkaḍuṅgō for his help, he will still not give up his pride.

> 'I come not begging alms of thee, because
> My generous patron Pāri, for that land left
> From where there can be no return.'[4]

He is generous, however, in his praise of Selvakkaḍuṅgō. He gives a list of things which the monarch will not do and the Sun will:

> 'Thou hast a limit, thou turnest thy back,
> Thou shiftest position, hidest behind the hill!'[5]

He praises his hands, for their hardness caused by ceaseless work. But none of his connections seems to have been so closely bound up with his life as his relationship with Pāri.

Kabilar's love-poetry, like most Saṅgam love-poetry, is completely detached from the author's life, and is purely a cultivation of art for art's sake.

His *Kuṟiñcippāṭṭu*, one of the Ten Idylls, was written to instruct an Aryan prince in Tamil poetic convention. It is put into the mouth of the heroine's maid, and is

[1] Ibid, 236; *Paḍiṟṟuppattu*, 61. [2] *S.I.I.* VII, 863.
[3] *Puṟanānūṟu*, 143. [4] *Paḍiṟṟuppattu*, 61. [5] *Puṟanānūṟu*, 8.

addressed to her mother, the heroine's nurse. Of course, the heroine is a mountain-nymph, but she is the daughter of a mountain-chieftain, and quite the princess in her own domains. By her maid's account, she and her maid have come across an adventure in the woods. Scared by a rogue-elephant, she is driven by her fright into the arms of a hunter-youth who saves her. The acquaintance thus formed develops into a romance, and the maid pleads with her mother to see the two united. Most of the story is a fib the girl tells to smooth mismanaged matters, the one truth being that the heroine is really involved in a love-scrape and is in a fix when her parents contemplate marriage for her. Now all this is told in the most pleasant way imaginable, the girls bathing and plucking flowers, the hunter-youth being fantastically decked out, the tusker making its formidable appearance, and finally the climax. But just once in the course of the narrative Kabilar yields to a rather inartistic freak, the enumeration of wild flowers that makes a tedious list. The monotony, however, is relieved by the lilt of the narrative. It must also be said, that, while it is Kabilar's most ambitious piece extant, it does not possess his characteristic flashes of brilliance.

A clean one-fifth of *Aiṅguṟunūṟu* is Kabilar's contribution. We get very lovely images, marvels of condensation, here. One is a retort a young wife flings at an old friend who pities her hard lot under her husband's roof:

'Sweeter than the milk
With honey in our land, the muddied drops
The deer had left beneath
The scrubs in his dry desert land'[1].

[1] *Aiṅguṟunūṟu*, 203.

In another, anxious and unsuspecting parents invite a witch-doctor to charm the devil out of their love-lorn girl. The girl's shrewd attendant, watching the performance with amusement, questions her in no whisper:

> 'He sings of Muruha; and is that then
> Thy lover's name?'[1]

We have to infer that the hint has the desired effect. The loveliest of his *aham* pieces, however, in feeling, suggestive imagery and sensitive modulations of tone, is that beginning, 'yārum illai, tāṉē kaḷvaṉ'. A translation is attempted below:

> 'None else was there, but only he, the thief;
> Should he be false, what should I do?
> And when we met, there was in our sight
> Only the stork, with leg as thin as a wisp of straw,
> That into the gliding water peered for prey.'[2]

The symbolism in the last two lines is too obvious to need comment. There is ample variety, we observe, of mood and situation. Kabilar may harp ever on the *kuṟiñci* string, but he can evoke many a tune out of it. Kabilar's observations of Nature have no match in Saṅgam literature.

> 'The crocodile dozes in the woodland stream
> So strewn with flower-petals shaken down
> That its own hue is lost.'[3]

> 'The swing's long rope
> That scarred the bending bough.'[4]

> 'The tusker huge
> Trumpets, because the mist comes to conceal
> His slumbering mate . . . upon the mountain-side.'[5]

[1] *Aiṅguṟunūṟu*, 247. [2] *Kuṟundohai*, 25. [3] *Ahanānūṟu*, 18. [4] *Naṟṟiṇai*, 222. [5] Ibid, 222.

An interesting detail is the gusto with which he mentions the jack fruit. His beloved Pāri's hill is not the less dear to him because, 'there, from the fresh wound in the jack's ripe fruit, the breezes scatter honey'.[1] Most bounteous Nature is complete only with the jack.

'. . . The little stone
Sped from the woodman's catapult, shot
Like an arrow scattering *vēṅgai* flowers, and spilt
The honey from the comb, before it rests
Within the jack's sweet fruit'.[2]

Kabilar's similes make us start at their audacity and aptness.

'The *vēṅgai* shakes its blossoms down, as sparks
Of fire that in the smithy fly'.[3]

'There in the *vēṅgai* tree with blooms ablaze
The long-plumed peacock like a damsel sits,
Who gathers flowers'.[4]

Nearly every page of Kabilar, apart from *Kuṟiñcippāṭṭu*, could yield us similar instances of his genius. But it is time we passed on to others.

Avvai

Avvai may be considered as a younger contemporary of Paraṇar and even Kabilar, from her own words[5]. Hers is a familiar name to the Tamil mind. The child who does not hear of Kabilar, Paraṇar and Nakkīrar, still cannot escape hearing of Avvai some time or other. The Sybil of Tamil is credited with very long life. She belongs to the Saṅgam period; she is associated with Chērmāṉ Perumāḷ[6] of the 8th century A.D., Oṭṭakkūttaṉ

[1] *Paḍiṟṟuppattu*, 61. [2] *Ahanānūṟu*, 292. [3] *Naṟṟiṇai*, 13. [4] *Aiṅguṟunūṟu*, 297. [5] *Puṟanānūṟu*, 99; *Ahanānūṟu*, 303. [6] *Tamiḻ Nāvalar Saridai*, Kaḻaham edit. pp. 53 and 54.

and Kamban[1] of the 12th century and Puhaḻēndi[2] of the 13th. But the Avvai whom our children know is not the Avvai of the Saṅgam age. *Āttiśūḍi* and *Koṉṟaivēndan* are gems of wisdom, but of decidedly later authorship.

The stories about Avvai are however in keeping with her character as reflected in Saṅgam poetry. An independent, high-spirited, old woman, revered by kings and by the people, she is said to have snubbed Kamban. That is an impossibility, however, in respect of time, for Kamban came a thousand years later. As we did for Kabilar, we could gather a little of her life from her own poems. There are all too few of them, but each bears the stamp of her individuality.

Most poetesses have remained essentially feminine. Avvai is an exception. She is represented more in the *puṟam* poems than in the *aham* poems. Her voice is an oracle for kings. She guides politics. She taunts an enemy chief with the uselessness of his ornamented weapons. Her war-poems remind us of bones and sinews long used to the battlefield. How this old woman acquired such strength and wisdom is a mystery. But we never see her young. She might have belonged to the dancing class in her youth[3], and her gifts under such opportunities might have ripened and earned her universal recognition by the time she was old. This, however, is pure conjecture.

Some facts about her life are recognisable from her work. Her great friend was Adihamāṉ. Most of her poems in *Puṟanānūṟu* are addressed to him. His regard for her finds no parallel except in Pāri's love for Kabilar and Kōpperuñcōḻaṉ's love for Piśirāndaiyār.[4] We infer that their first acquaintance was not very pro-

[1] *Vinōdarasa-mañcari* (1950 edit.), pp. 381 and 391. [2] Ibid, p. 391.
[3] *Puṟanāṉūṟu*, 89. [3] Ibid, 215.

mising. Avvai felt herself insulted. But Adihamāṉ, later, corrected his mistake. She remained his court-poet to the end of his life. He even deputed her once to see Toṇḍaimāṉ who had threatened him with war. Never was a prouder ambassador. Toṇḍaimāṉ took his enemy's messenger to the halls where he kept his weapons of war. This is Avvai's stiff comment:

'These, with plumes bedecked and garlanded,
With rounded ornamental hilts and greased,
Are in thy guarded palace; those[1]
That stabbed the enemy, and spoilt their blades,
Are in the blacksmith's puny tent'.[2]

Avvai has left three elegies on Adihamāṉ's death. One of them is tense with grief, and very nearly breaks convention down It sobs through its pauses and modulations. A translation of this is attempted here:

'If he had a little wine, he gave it us; that's no more to be!
If he had more,
He drank with joy the while we sang; no more to be!
His little rice in many plates he served; no more to be!
If he had more, in many plates he served; no more to be!
All the meat, fat upon the bone, to us he gave; no more to be!
All the ways shot through with arrow and with spear he faced; no more to be!
With hand that smelt of fragrant limes
He caressed my head that smelt of flesh; no more to be!
The spear that launched upon his warrior-breast,
Pierced through the almsbowl of the minstrels great,
Tore through the palm of beggars,
And while his subjects' eyes grew dim with grief,
Shot straight upon the tongues of bards renowned and wise!

[1] Adihamāṉ's weapons of war. [2] *Puṟanānūṟu*, 95.

Where is he gone, my father and my stay?
Henceforth, the poets are not, nor those that give to bards.
Many the lives that will not give:
Large wine-filled flowers of rattlewort,
Lie useless on cool waters still'.[1]

In *Puṟanānūṟu* Avvai's style is very strong and forcible. No wonder she was a felt voice in her day, though she does express a little bitterness speaking of the poet's status:

'This minstrel's life, that pines for alms'.[2]

In her love-poems her voice softens, and her style is illuminated by metaphor and simile:

'The mighty bough of the *kāyā* rich with flowers
Is like a peacock's neck, silk-soft and blue'.[3]

A lyrical quality, very rare in Saṅgam poetry, is pronounced in Avvai's *aham* verse. Here is the translation of a very musical description of sunset:

'Now folds the water-lily; the shadows flow
Towards the east; the sun that seeks the hills
Reddens, and earth grows cool; the coastal groves
With various flowers, their beauty slowly lose'.[4]

Kabilar would have been proud to number poems such as these among his own. And it is a matter of pleasure for us to think that the aesthetic sense was yet so alive and vibrant in the old woman who took her position in society as the adviser to kings and the Sybil of wisdom for posterity.

Nakkirar

Nakkīrar is for every lover of Tamil literature the author of *Neḍunalvāḍai*, and for every Śaivite the author

[1] *Puṟanānūṟu*, 235. [2] Ibid, 206. [3] *Kuṟundohai*, 183.
[4] *Naṟṟiṇai*. 187.

of *Tirumuruhāṟṟuppaḍai*. His work is not half as voluminous as Kabilar's, but it must be remembered that Saṅgam literature has nothing greater to boast of than *Neḍunalvāḍai*. The life of this remarkable poet is a blank apart from myth, which generally associates him with Kabilar and Paraṇar. Kabilar refers to Evvi, the contemporary of Nakkīrar's patron Neḍuñceḷiyaṉ[1]. But Nakkīrar himself mentions Kabilar in the past[2]. We may take him, therefore, as a younger contemporary of Kabilar.

Pattuppāṭṭu or the Ten Idylls is the most ambitious of the Saṅgam collections, each poem running to considerable length. Two of these ten are by Nakkīrar. The authorship of *Tirumuruhāṟṟuppaḍai* is now disputed.[3] Apart from one or two grammatical peculiarities, which themselves are not found in later literature, there is nothing to make us attribute it to a later author. Besides, this *āṟṟuppaḍai*, though its theme is religion, shows an artistic rather than a devotional trend, and the treatment runs parallel to that of *Neḍunalvāḍai*. Both poems begin on the same note and in both, the use of simile is sparing considering the rest of Saṅgam literature.

An *āṟṟuppaḍai* is supposed to be addressed to an indigent poet by another who has returned from a patron laden with honours. He guides his less fortunate brother to the residence of the patron. This affords excellent opportunity for dealing with the prowess and glory of the patron. Now *Tirumuruhāṟṟuppaḍai* is supposed to be a guide-book to Muruha, and as such, is held in high esteem by the Śaivites. The deep earnestness and sweetness of the hymns of the Āḻvārs and the Nāyaṉārs are not to be found in it, but there is certainly a deliberate and careful

[1] *Puṟanānūṟu*, 24 and 202. [2] *Ahanānūṟu*, 78. [3] *Hist. of Tamil Lang. and Lit.* p. 34.

artistry. There is, first, a carefully made-out scheme. Details are filled in. The effects of contrast are exploited cleverly. Muruha, surrounded by lovely goddesses, is set off against Muruha in the battlefield where dances a female devil who bears in her hand 'a black and carrion-stinking head, whose eyes were dug up and eaten'.[1] The whole can be compared to a magnificent picture, worked out not in the white-heat of passion as some would have it, but the artist's calmest frame of mind. In all these aspects, it is an exact parallel of *Neḍunalvāḍai*, which, however, has the additional advantage of not being confined to the sympathies of one particular sect.

Neḍunalvāḍai begins with a very feeling description of Nature in the rains, reminding us of Keats describing winter in *St. Agnes' Eve*.

'The earth is cold . . . .
From chilly boughs hang coloured drops of rain . . . .
When sharp winds blow to chill the very hills.'

The description gradually takes us into the king's capital, Madura. Even there, all summer activities have been suspended. This is shown even in bird-life.

'The domestic pigeon-cock, red-legged, goes not abroad,
But stunned and helpless . . .
Shifts constantly his feet upon the perch'.[2]

We get details of the luxury of life in the capital, and against all that magnificence, by contrast, we recognise the queen, pining for her lord who is away in the battlefield. She looks an unfinished picture,

'In thread-bare garment, ennobled by its dust;
. . . . . and with the tip
Of her rosy finger now and then she spills

[1] *Tirumuruhāṟṟuppaḍai*, ll. 53 and 54. [2] *Neḍunalvāḍai*, ll. 45-48.

The shining tear-drops that in heavy lids
Collected, roll down fast'.[1]

The scene shifts to the battlefield, where the king goes round visiting the wounded.

'Under the umbrella white, with strings
Of pearls hung round, that shields him from the drops
Of humming , spraying rain',[2]

'. . . he rests
One hand upon the shoulder of a youth
Warlike, on whom the royal sword is slung;
His face bears comfort in a gentle smile'.[3]

The artistic scheme is obvious. The personality of the king, confronted by stern duty, and that of the queen, pining for love, are set off by each other against a background of rainy weather. Detail after detail is worked out with the sharpness of an etching on glass. If Saṅgam poetry appeals chiefly to the visual capacities of the mind, *Neḍunalvāḍai* cannot be surpassed in that sphere.

Nakkīrar is also represented in *Ahanānūṟu*. Here, he changes his tactics of simple observation for the language of metaphor and simile which distinguishes *Ahanānūṟu* in general. Nakkīrar's bent here seems to be for *pālai*. The artist is always evident.

'The street-lamps lit, and garlands hung',[4]

brings out at one stroke the festive night. This is a glimpse of Nature's beauty:

'The early summer, when *kōṅgam* buds unfold
And the *īṅgai*'s tender leaves with loveliness
Are trembling'.[5]

[1] *Neḍunalvāḍai*, ll. 136-166. [2] Ibid, ll. 184-185. [3] Ibid, ll. 182-183. [4] *Ahanānūṟu*, 141. [5] *Naṟṟiṇai*, 86.

Of the four major poets of Saṅgam literature, Nakkīrar is decidedly the most conscious craftsman. His works do not show the exuberance of Kabilar's genius, but, Kabilar excepted, the author of *Neḍunalvāḍai* must be ranked second to none in Saṅgam literature.

Miscellaneous Poets

We have done with the major poets of this period. But, no study of it will be complete without a glance at *Paṭṭinappālai* and *Mullaippāṭṭu*, two of the *Pattuppāṭṭu* pieces. For us the value of *Paṭṭinappālai* is twofold, antiquarian and literary. It is a poem that describes Kāvirippūm-paṭṭiṉam, of which we hear a good deal in a great work of later date, *Silappadihāram*. That maritime town reminds us of ancient Venice, prosperous with trade, though today its namesake is a miserable village, at the mouth of the river Kāvēri. All the poet's praises of the city, we are to understand, were just meant to please its ruler Karikālaṉ and immortalise him. The poet, however, has tried to give a romantic colouring to it, by bringing to it a touch of *aham* tradition. A lover soliloquises, saying that all the riches of Kāvirippūm-paṭṭiṉam could not tempt him to leave his beloved, for life with her is as sweet as the gracious rule of Karikālaṉ, whereas parting from her is as dreadful as Karikālaṉ's anger. Under cover of this romance he passes off gracefully all that flattery of Karikālaṉ. But the *āham* veil being so thin, just occupying four lines out of the three hundred, we would be justified in assigning this poem its place among the *puṟam* poems.

The structure of the poem may not be so artistically planned as *Neḍunalvāḍai*, but its metre[1] is certainly a very happy choice. Most of the lines are short and

[1] *vañci* with *āśiriyam*.

drowsy moving, relieved by longer, brisker lines occasionally, and they literally sing. Some spell seems to have been on the poet when this composition was in progress, as it was on Coleridge when he wrote his *Ancient Mariner*.

We will look at a few of his lovely vignettes from Kāvirippūm-paṭṭiṉam. In the suburbs,

> 'The first-born of the mighty buffalo,
> Fed full on ripening paddy sheaves,
> Dozes within the haystack's shade'.[1]

On the beach the fishing nets are spread out to dry on the sand like 'darkness settled upon the moonlight'.[2] This is how merchants carry on trade in Kāvirippūm-paṭṭiṉam: 'They take not more, they give not less'.[3] Throughout, the haunting cadences of the poem sing in our ear.

> 'kuḻal ahava, yāḻ murala,
> muḻavadira, murasiyamba'.[4]

The city of Kāvirippūm-paṭṭiṉam is recreated for us by this poet in all its enchanting, if somewhat confused, details.

The author of this wonderful poem can hardly be classed as a minor poet. This credit goes to Uruttiraṅ-gaṇṇaṉār of Kaḍiyalūr. Like other Saṅgam poets, his life is clean forgotten. He seems to have been patronised by Karikālaṉ of whom Kaḻāttalaiyār also sings[5], and this draws Uruttiraṅgaṇṇaṉār nearer to Kabilar's age. Besides Paṭṭiṉappālai, he has written two short pieces and a long poem, *Perumbāṇāṟṟuppaḍai*, the most ambitious of the four *āṟṟuppaḍais*. *Perumbāṇāṟṟuppaḍai* is however prized chiefly for its antiquarian value, for its description of

[1] *Paṭṭinappālai*, ll. 13-15. [2] Ibid, l. 82. [3] Ibid, l. 210.
[4] Ibid, ll. 156 and 157. [5] *Puṟanānūṟu*, 65.

the *yāḻ*, or harp of the ancient Tamils, and for its record of rural life in Tamilnad.

Two other pieces claim our notice. One is *Mullaip-pāṭṭu*, which, in plan and execution, reminds us very strongly of *Neḍunalvāḍai*. This is also a poem of separation between lovers. Here also it is rainy weather. The husband is away, again, encamped on the battlefield. The pale wife is eaten with her anxiety. But the poem ends on a note of hope. The lady's maid, venturing out of the house, hears a woman comforting a calf, saying, 'Your mother comes'. Taking that as a good omen, she returns to her mistress to comfort her, saying, 'So will your lord come'. Here again, it is a study of contrasts between a picture of patient waiting and another of active engagement in warfare. In its technique, in its delicately drawn pen-pictures, the poem is very much the sister-poem of the longer and more ambitious *Neḍunalvāḍai*, and for that very reason thrown a little into the shade. There is a lovely description of flowers, however, which stands by itself. The author of the poem is one Nappūdaṉār, son of a gold-merchant of Kāvirippūm-paṭṭiṇam. There is a reference to the Yavaṉas in it, as there is in Nakkīrar's *Neḍunalvāḍai* and his *Puṟanānūṟu* 56. Probably Nappūdaṉār belongs to Nakkīrar's period.

The other is *Siṟupāṇāṟṟuppaḍai*, by far the best of the *āṟṟuppaḍais*, though the shortest. As an example of the *āṟṟuppaḍais*, and by virtue of its own merits, it is worth consideration. A minstrel has returned from Nalliyakkōḍaṉ laden with gifts. On the way he meets an unfortunate brother of his profession, accompanied by his poverty-stricken dependants. He guides the group to Nalliyakkōḍaṉ who is sure to help them. He first warns them that it is no good seeking out the Cēra, Cōḻa and Pāṇḍiya. Incidentally he describes all the conventional

scenery, fitting into it the Cēra, Cōḷa and Pāṇḍiya lands and the important places of Nalliyakkōḍaṉ's territory. Quite beautiful are some of his pictures. In the *marudam* background, the lotus bud breaks open under the drop of honey from the boughs overhead, and the dragon-fly settles on the golden cushion within[1]. But more powerful than all the rest is the minstrel's description of his poverty[2] before he was relieved by Nalliyakkōḍaṉ. The starved bitch, with her blind and helpless pups, lies near a cold hearth, refusing to suckle them. The woman of the house is compelled to gather leafy vegetables, and she cooks them without even salt to add. Then—and here is the beauty of it—she calls her family round this fare and shuts the door on the world 'for fear the ignorant should see to scorn'. Such was his own condition before he went to see Nalliyakkōḍaṉ. The walk to Nalliyakkōḍaṉ's is an experience by itself. On the way, the swollen bulb-like *muṇḍaham* 'drops sapphires'[3], the *puṉṉai* 'blooms pearls'[4] and the *tāḷai* 'flowers swans'[5]. This method of description is well exploited by Naṟṟattaṉār, the author of *Siṟupāṇāṟṟuppaḍai*. His references, in the poem, to Pāri, Adihamāṉ, Pēhaṉ etc., lead us to infer that he might have flourished just after them.

In general, the method of Saṅgam poets, especially in love-poetry, is photographic. They trust to the effectiveness of visual impression. They do not generally deal with violent passions. They are not concerned with humour. They do not indulge in spontaneous song. Their is a chaste, subdued, classical way of recording memorable events in human life. They are fastidious in their selection of vignettes from life, against a background of Nature, for poetic exposition. Their efficient system

[1] *Siṟupāṇāṟṟuppaḍai*, ll. 71-77. [2] Ibid, ll. 130-140. [3] Ibid, l. 148. [4] Ibid, l. 149. [5] Ibid, l. 146.

of convention, while it restrains their imagination, provides an admirable model on which to give it shape. The poem may be from the long *Pattuppāṭṭu*, or from the very concise *Aiṅguṟunūṟu*. But the method remains essentially the same. Only in *puṟam* poetry, is there some freedom of self-expression granted to the poet. But, even here, the sense of obligation to a patron is a hindrance. Art that is not free cannot go on endlessly. Within strict limits, it tends to stagnate and lose its health. Thus Saṅgam art had to exhaust its resources one day, in spite of the many talents it could boast of, and die a natural death.

III. THE POST-SANGAM PERIOD

(250 A.D.—600 A.D.)

1. The Title

In South Indian history this is called 'the Dark Period'.[1] The old Tamil dynasties seem to have gone into obscurity now. In the north, the Tirayas and Chōḷas were superseded by the Pallavas who established themselves in Kāñchi about 250 A.D. The Pallavas too do not have a connected history till we come to the end of the sixth century. From what we know, they were foreigners to the Tamil land, bringing with them a foreign culture. Under them, not only Brahminism but Buddhism and Jainism flourished in the soil. Prākrit was their state-language in the beginning, but Sanskrit took its place later on. They founded several Sanskrit colleges, of which the one at Kāñchi became famous even beyond their land.[2] The Jain monastery at Tiruppādirippuliyūr played an important role in the advancement of Prākrit and Sanskrit learning.[3] Further south, the Chōḷa country proper, though the Chōḷa dynasty was not extinct, was probably in the hands of the Kalabhras, and we hear of the Kalabhra king Achchuta Vikkanta in possession of it in the second half of the fifth century A.D.[4] Buddhism and Pāli were flourishing in his reign. It is no wonder, therefore, that not many Tamil works of great importance were produced in these parts. Having lost the patronage of the zealous Tamil rulers, Tamil had to seek refuge in religion. And

[1] Sāstri, K. A. N., *A History of South India*, p. 139. [2] Dr. Meenakshi, *Administration and Social Life under the Pallavas*, p. 187. [3] Ibid, p. 229. [4] P.T.S., *History of the Tamils*, pp. 529-530.

the seeds of the great 'Bhakti Movement' were sown here in the sixth century A.D.

But, in the far south and the west coast, the Pāṇḍyas and the Chēras seem to have been still in power. Probably the Kalabhras appeared on the scene comparatively later. Here too Buddhism and Jainism were getting popular. The Jain Sangam established in the third quarter of the fifth century A.D.[1] was taking great interest in Tamil. Perhaps, this Sangam had the patronage of the Pāṇḍyas. Anyway, there seems to have been a vigorous literary activity in Madura. The literature of the period presents some new elements, the elements of didacticism and religion, owing to the impact of Buddhism and Jainism. Sanskrit and Prākrit words are used more freely than in the previous period. The quality of the literature itself challenges comparison with that of other periods. What was lost in the north was more than compensated for in the south.

Such being the case, the title, 'the Dark Period' is not quite appropriate, at least in a book on the history of Tamil literature. We might, however, call it 'the Post-Sangam Period'. The literature of the period has not freed itself from the influence of the Sangam classics. True, elements of didacticism and religion are prominent in this literature. Yet, the *Kuṟaḷ*, which is its best didactic work, sets apart a full section for the *aham* theme. Again in *Silappadihāram*, one of the works with a religious colouring, the influence of the Sangam literature is conspicuous in the moods of its lyrics and the plan of its descriptive passages. And, above all, traditional poetry itself continues, with its dormant dramatic and lyrical qualities fully developed in *Kalittohai*.

[1] P.T.S., *History of the Tamils*, p. 247.

2. The Chronology of the Works

If the chronology of the Sangam period is confusing, that of this period is worse. However, some light comes from *Maṇimēhalai*. The author of this work has made *Nyāyapravēśa* the basis of his exposition of Buddhist logic.[1] *Nyāyapravēśa* was written by Dignāga who lived not later than the fourth century A.D.[2] *Maṇimēhalai*, therefore, comes after this period. In it there is a reference to *Vaiśāka*, the natal star of the Buddha, as the middle one of the twenty seven constellations of the zodiac[3]. That would give the first place to *Kārtika*. The system of reckoning the constellations with *Kārtika* as the first was given up from the beginning of the sixth century A.D. Hence *Maṇimēhalai* may be assigned to a period earlier than this[4]. There is also a reference in the work to one Kōvalaṉ as the forefather of the heroine, who lived nine generations earlier, in the time of Imayavarambaṉ of the Sangam period[5]. Though the heroine is not a historical personage, this information may be taken as indicating roughly a distance of at least two and a half centuries between the Sangam period and that of *Maṇimēhalai*. This date agrees more or less with 465 A.D., the date of *Silappadihāram*, arrived at by an astronomical investigation based on the data furnished by it[6]. *Maṇimēhalai* and *Silappadihāram*, according to their prefatory verses, were contemporary works. Thus we arrive at the second half of the fifth century as the most probable date of the two epics. The contributions to Śaivite literature by Aiyaḍihaḷ Kāḍavar Kōṉ and Kāraikkāl Ammaiyār were

[1] *Hist. of Tamil Lang. and Lit.* p. 151. [2] Keith, *A History of Sanskrit Literature*, p. 484. [3] XI, 40-43. [4] *Sendamiḻ*, XV, p. 633. [5] XXVIII, 103, 104 and 123-125. [6] *The Journal of the Mythic Society—Culture and Heritage Number*, 1956.

probably made in the sixth century A.D. Aiyaḍihaḷ is identified with the Pallava king Simhavarman III of the sixth century[1]. As for Kāraikkāl Ammaiyār, Sēkkiḻār has clearly pointed out that she comes prior to Sambandar[2].

Nothing is so hopelessly perplexing as the dates of the *Padiṉeṇ-kīḻ-k-kaṇakku* works. They claim the same antiquity as the Sangam poems[3]—only *Kaḷavaḻi*, *Iṉṉā Nāṟpadu* and *Mudumoḻi-k-kāñci* could justify, to some extent, this claim[4]. *Nāladiyā* refers to the Muttaraiyar, of the seventh century, and hence cannot go earlier[5]. *Iṉiyavai Nāṟpadu* is also a later work, since it mentions the worship of Brahma, which we do not come across earlier than in the seventh century[6]. And *Āsāra-k-kōvai* too, by reason of its indebtedness to the later Sanskrit *smritis*, has to find a later date[7]. Luckily, there is a quotation from the *Kuṟaḷ*, along with the mention of its author, in *Maṇimēhalai*.[8] Hence, the latest limit of the *Kuṟaḷ* may be fixed as the fifth century A.D. As the language of the work is obviously later than that of the Sangam poems[9] the fourth century A.D. may be accepted as the approximate date for it. The remaining fourteen works, didactic and traditional, would come after the *Kuṟaḷ*, and probably belong to the fifth and sixth centuries.

The question of the date of *Kalittohai* may be taken up next. Here, *Paripāḍal* comes to our help. Both these anthologies, though assigned to the Sangam period, have to come later by virtue of their language[10]. They

[1] Rājamāṇikkaṉār, *Periyapurāṇa Ārāycci*, pp. 95 and 96.
[2] *Periyapurāṇam*, *Sambandar Purāṇam* St. 1008. [3] Vaiyāpuri Piḷḷai, *Ilakkiyamaṇimālai* (edit. 1954), p. 86. [4] The names of the authors of the works are in the list of the Sangam poets. [5] *Ilakkiyamaṇimālai*, pp. 92-93. [6] *Hist. of Tamil Lang. and Lit.* p. 93. [7] Ibid, pp. 93 and 94. [8] XXII, 59-61. [9] *Ilakkiyamaṇimālai*, (edit. 1954), pp. 94-101. [10] *Hist. of Tamil Lang. and Lit.* pp. 56 and 57.

might be taken to belong, however, to the time of Nallanduvaṉār, as he has contributed a considerable share to both and has compiled the former. Poem 11 of *Paripāḍal* contains astronomical data which, when worked out, gives 372 A.D.[1] as the date of the composition of the poem. Thus, not only *Paripāḍal* but *Kalittohai* would go to the second half of the fourth century. And *Muttoḷḷāyiram*, still another conventional work of importance, might very well go to the end of the sixth century A.D., as it sings the praise of the Pāṇḍya king Kaḍuṅgōṉ.[2]

3. The Kuṛaḷ of Vaḷḷuvar

Now, we shall pass on to the *Kuṛaḷ* which is one of the two greatest Tamil classics and the one Tamil book which has been universally acclaimed. The book has had more competent commentators, critics and translators than any other Tamil work. The chief among the translators are the Rev. G. U. Pope, V. V. S. Aiyar and the Rev. H. A. Popley. Of these three, V. V. S. Aiyar's translation is perhaps the most readable in spite of needless archaisms, bringing out the meaning of the original most fully. But the fact that it is in rhythmic prose, a most diffuse, though beautiful form of expression, takes it very far away indeed from the technique of the original, which is terse beyond comparison. The Rev. Pope has done momentous work on this book, but unfortunately his verses also could never be placed beside the *Kuṛaḷ's* finished couplets. The Rev. Popley's is a sort of compromise between the two, trying to keep the crispness of the original. Yet these notable efforts only impress on us the abject failure of translation, especially where a work like the *Kuṛaḷ* is concerned. For the *Kuṛaḷ* has two aspects to its greatness—the most profound thought on the most baffling problems of existence,

[1] *Sendamiḻ*, XIX, p. 384. [2] Muttukkaṇēśaṉ's edit. 53.

and the most astounding economy of words and finish of style. To recapture both in another language would be an impossibility. Thus, through the very best of translations, our sage Vaḷḷuvar is in danger of appearing like a mere factory of maxims.

There is a tradition that Vaḷḷuvar belongs to Mylapore. A verse in *Tiruvaḷḷuvamālai*[1] claims him for Madura. But, in general, like most of our ancient poets, Vaḷḷuvar has modestly retired behind the screen of obscurity. Even his name is not left to us. However, the name Tiruvaḷḷuvar, by which he passes, tells us an interesting story of its own. It means the saintly Vaḷḷuvar. The term Vaḷḷuvar stands for a depressed community whose distance from the higher castes in education and prosperity is unthinkable. However much may belong to individual genius, we are bound to accept that a man is essentially the child of his environment. The fountain of this sage's inspiration betrays no taint of the sordid life to which his community has been condemned for centuries. What reason can we assign to this? Ingenuity has tried to explain it away by imagining a trace of Brahmin blood in him, and this accounts for the tradition that Vaḷḷuvar and other poets of repute such as Kabilar and Avvai were all the castaway children of a Brahmin father and a Pulaya mother[2]. The legend has no foundation. Besides, Vaḷḷuvar does not show the complexes of an abandoned child, nor does he accept the inequalities of caste. Nor indeed are caste-differences pronounced in Tamil literature down to his day, and we may infer that in Vaḷḷuvar's day the social set-up had not become so degraded as to deny 'a low-caste' Vaḷḷuvaṉ the privilege of thinking out a moral code of his own. It was an age when as yet the ordinary man was not disallowed by caste-restrictions to

[1] Poem 21. [2] *Ñāṉāmirdam*, (old edit.) p. 70.

think for himself in the light of God's free day, and Vaḷḷuvar was fitted by a clear head, a clean heart and an exceptionally distinguished pen to record the best of such thought in deathless verse. Not a whit more about Vaḷḷuvar's life is definite. True, he treats love like a lover, and of children like a father who knows the joy of his children. But if that leads us to assumptions about his family life, how do we regard his wisdom about kings and ascetics? As with Shakespeare, nothing of the man is betrayed in his work beyond a superhuman understanding of the world. One is startled to find scholars giving credit to such silly stories as Vaḷḷuvar's bidding his obedient wife to fan the cold rice simply to prove to his guest the conveniences of having a docile wife. We would be glad to believe that Vaḷḷuvar respected womanhood more than that, and we cannot draw our inferences from vague sources. Even the pathetic little quatrain[1] said to be composed by him on the death of his beloved wife cannot be said to be authentic. Some very pretty poetaster could have manufactured that for him[2].

Vaḷḷuvar is such a general favourite that each sect is anxious to claim him for its own. The Śaivites say that he was one of them and the Vaishṇavites also claim him. The Rev. H. A. Popley claims for him a Christian outlook. Every one of these claims is defeated by the author of the *Kuṟaḷ*. If at all he professes any religion, it would appear to be Jainism from the first chapter of the book[3].

As for Sanskrit influence, there is no need to deny what of it is found there. A hunt through the 1330 couplets will reveal about 125 Sanskrit words[4] which is not a

[1] Naccinārkiniyar, *Com. to Tol. Poruḷ.* 153. [2] Vaiyāpuri Piḷḷai, *Tamiḻ Suḍar Maṇihaḷ*, p. 55. [3] *Hist. of Tamil Lang. and Lit.*, p. 81. [4] *Tamiḻ Suḍar Maṇihaḷ*, pp. 71-72.

large percentage, though slightly larger than that found in Sangam literature. The gradual pervasion of Sanskrit vocabulary was accepted, as a matter of course, by Vaḷḷuvar. He also shows quite a close knowledge of some of the Sanskrit classics. *Kuṟaḷ* 41, 'Whoever leads a successful home-life is a prop to the three other kinds of seekers' is an echo from Manu.[1] *Kuṟaḷ* 501, which prescribes that a minister should be chosen on the basis of his character or his attitude to virtue, wealth and love, is derived without doubt from Cāṇakya's *Arthasāstra*[2]. Some of Vaḷḷuvar's phrases like 'piṟavi-p-peruṅgaḍal', 'the great sea of birth', are just a rendering from Sanskrit into lucid Tamil.

But to accept all this is not to say that the *Kuṟaḷ* is a translation from the Sanskrit, for there is nothing like the *Kuṟaḷ* in the field of Sanskrit ethical poetry. While in minor details there are a few unmistakable proofs of familiarity with the Sanskrit classics, in large outline, in width of outlook, and, in general, in the temper of the composition, the *Kuṟaḷ* is very far removed indeed from the Sanskrit classics. Vaḷḷuvar might generously recognize the greatness of *Manusmriti* from which he occasionally borrows in his section on *aṟam* or Virtue. He does not, however, partition humanity into the *four varṇas*. Nor does he recognize the greatness of a caste by itself. Unlike Manu again, he gives woman a high status in society. She is entrusted with the family purse. In her worth lies the good fortune of her husband. She is man's helpmate. The ideal set forth throughout, as the Rev. Popley says, is that of monogamy, and monogamy always means the elevation of womanhood. True, he enjoins upon woman the duty of worshipping her husband, believing that, from such a clear fountain of emotion,

[1] III, 78. [2] I, 10.

all other virtues arise. But we do not quite see that that is reducing woman to a subordinate position as long as the husband is also bound to her.

In the treatment of *poruḷ* or Politics again, his fundamental ideals are very different from the Sanskrit ones. In the *Arthasāstra* cunning is permitted where fair means do not answer. But in the *Kuṟaḷ* all is to be fair and square. Wielding the reins of government is an absolutely noble game. Whether the *Kuṟaḷ* does answer the requirements of a crooked world is another question; whether the Tamil princes, for whom the *Kuṟaḷ* was made the gospel of ethics, cared to abide by it is very doubtful; but the fact remains that the lofty ideals are there.

As for the section on Love, it has been suggested that the *Kuṟaḷ* is indebted to Vātsyāyana's *Kāmasūtra*.[1] Most likely the *Kuṟaḷ* itself is the earlier work. Besides, there is a great difference between the treatment of love seen in the two. Love, in the *Kuṟaḷ*, is an exalting, pervading, transforming passion, not a mere cult of the body, as it is in the *Kāmasūtra*. Nobody need be diffident about putting the *Kuṟaḷ* into the hands of the young, for there is nothing in it that can contaminate the mind by exalting the body. Though the poet does show a keen sensitiveness to the beauty of woman as seen through the lover's eyes, he preserves a genuine modesty entirely absent from the *Kāmasūtra*. Vaḷḷuvar oversteps Tamil tradition as well in this one respect, deliberately suppressing the ugly fact of prostitution elaborated in the Sangam poems.

Dr. Pope, Father Beschi and other missionaries have said of the *Kuṟaḷ*, that it is the one oriental book, much of whose teaching is an echo of the Sermon on the Mount. It is not evident that Vaḷḷuvar came directly under the spell of any Christian teaching or influence, or that he

[1] *Hist. of Tamil Lang. and Lit.* p. 82.

was in the least touched by the personality of Christ. Vaḷḷuvar's personality itself is completely submerged in his teachings, a vast difference indeed from the Man whose personality can never be dissociated from His words. As for the teachings themselves, it would be to deny mankind all power of clear thinking to believe that the ideas could have been taken only from one religious source. We would willingly believe that the *Kuṟaḷ* was the result of the ripe experience of a man whose heart was pure and brain unclouded, and who, though open to external sources, looked into himself for the ultimate expression of the wisdom that was to make him, as the Rev. G. U. Pope said, 'Bard of Universal Man'.

We give below a handful of Vaḷḷuvar's maxims translated by the Rev. Popley:

'Be pure in mind, for that true Virtue is;
All else is merely sound and sham'.[1]

'If homely worth be lacking in the wife,
Whatever worth there be, no home-life can be there'.[2]

'"The flute is sweet, the lute is sweet", say those
Who've never heard the pretty prattle of their little ones'.[3]

'The living soul subsists in love;
The loveless are but skin and bone'.[4]

'The sore that's made by fire will heal again;
Not so the wound that by the tongue is made'.[5]

'Old Mother Earth will laugh to see
Men idling, saying: "We have nought".'[6]

The above sayings, one feels, bear closer resemblance, in substance, spirit and expression, to the gems of

[1] *The Sacred Kuṟaḷ*, 34. [2] Ibid, 52. [3] Ibid, 66. [4] Ibid, 80. [5] Ibid, 129. [6] Ibid, 1040.

Solomon's wisdom in the Old Testament than to the Sermon on the Mount. Sometimes Vaḷḷuvar has a spark of grim humour.

'The vile, maybe, are like the gods;
They, too, just do as they desire.'[1]
'If farmers quiet sit and go not to their land,
'Twill sulk and take the huff, like sulking wife.'[2]

We might as well glance at a few of the *Kuṟaḷ* couplets rendered by V. V. S. Aiyar into rhythmic prose. They bring out, though not the terseness, at least some of the quaint turns of phrasing, some of the repetitions and other tricks of style in the great original.

'Envy itself is scourge enough for the envious man: for, even if his enemies spare him, his own envy will work him ruin.'[3]

'The gracious expect no return when they oblige: how can the world ever repay the rain-cloud?'[4]

'They alone live who live without blemish: and they alone die who have lived without glory.'[5]

'It is wrong to get angry even when thou art helpless to strike: and when thou hast the power, there is nothing that is worse than anger.'[6]

'Even if they are noble, those that are not noble are not noble: and even if they are low-born, those that are not low are not low.'[7]

Again, these might be from Solomon's Songs:

'I never knew Death before: I know it now: it weareth the form of a woman and hath large and battling eyes.'[8]

'She is simple and gracious, but yet her eyes are versed in the ways of waging war: for they drink the lives of those that look on her.'[9]

[1] *The Sacred Kuṟaḷ*, 1073. [2] Ibid, 1039. [3] *The Kuṟaḷ*, 165. [4] Ibid, 211. [5] Ibid, 240. [6] Ibid, 302. [7] Ibid, 973. [8] Ibid, 1083. [9] Ibid, 1084.

'Is it by her fair forehead that my manhood is overcome, the manhood that causeth to tremble even those that have not yet faced me on the battle-field?[1]'

It might be fitting to call Tiruvaḷḷuvar the Solomon of Tamil literature.

The little couplets of the *Kuṟaḷ* are composed in the *veṇbā* metre which is one of the most distinctive and difficult of Tamil metres. The first line of the couplet consists of four feet and the second consists of three, the last foot being a peculiar kind of incomplete foot. The rules governing the linking of the last syllable of a foot with the first syllable of the subsequent foot are very strict and are beyond our scope here. Initial and internal rhymes are also common, though not compulsory. The poet reveals a complete mastery of this form. There is an interesting story of how a raw enthusiast found himself in hot water when he dared to bring an amendment of one of the best-known *Kuṟaḷ* pieces[2], in which he had put in initial rhyme where it was wanting, to Tyāgarāja Cheṭṭiyār. The omission of rhyme by Vaḷḷuvar was obviously intentional. The word, the unfortunate zealot had removed, meant 'that which is left', and he had substituted for it the word meaning 'children'. The poem stands to mean that your merits will be judged by posterity through the children you leave behind. Obviously Vaḷḷuvar was a better poet than his disciple, and Tyāgarāja Cheṭṭiyār's judgment, though not his temper, is justified. Vaḷḷuvar was master of *veṇbā* metre but he never sacrificed his meaning for metrical beauties.

Wherein lies the literary greatness of the *Kuṟaḷ*? Literary charm, it is too well-known, is an indefinable, inexplicable quality. The scope of the *Kuṟaḷ* imposes stern restrictions on the imagination, and we are also

[1] *The Kuṟaḷ*, 1088. [2] Couplet 114.

taught to believe, of ethical works, that 'so soon as the poet begins to moralise, he loses his sovereign throne'. This is true of Wordsworth and Browning, but the contrary is true of the *Kuṟaḷ*. We find in these terse ethical sayings the sparkle and finish of the best epigrams available in English. The diamonds are small, but they are of the purest water, and cut to show off to the best advantage. To quote from the Rev. H. A. Popley again, 'the terse, vivid couplets lend themselves so aptly to memorisation and quotation, and there is a charm about them that makes us want to repeat them again and again'.[1] Vaḷḷuvar preserves this poetic quality 'partly by the use of poetic devices of rhythm and alliteration and partly by means of artistic similes and happy illustrations'. Close-ups of Nature in the good old Sangam way are brought into the narrow space of seven feet by way of illumination. One simple test to prove the *Kuṟaḷ's* greatness is to do what the unfortunate experimenter before-mentioned did to improve it. Not one syllable is superfluous, not one expression could be bettered. In its field the *Kuṟaḷ* is supreme. After it, there have been didactic poems and there have been *kuṟaḷ veṇbās* in Tamil, but they have not approached the greatness of Vaḷḷuvar. That should be proof enough of what the *Kuṟaḷ* is worth. If anything could be mentioned as a defect, it is that he harps a little too much upon certain of his ideas. But so did Solomon of Israel. This weakness leads to Vaḷḷuvar's choosing some virtue for treatment, and while he is focusing on it, he completely forgets the existence of all other virtues. The *Kuṟaḷ*, though it is a vivid portrait of magnanimity and goodness in itself, is a little impracticable for the man of the workaday world. But it will not allow itself to be forgotten. Its golden shafts are far too piercing.

[1] Popley, *The Sacred Kuṟaḷ*, p. 32.

All the same, the *Kuṟaḷ* was written for the use of all men. Of the four aspects of life according to Sanskrit and Tamil tradition, Vaḷḷuvar has taken up only the first three—Virtue, Wealth or Politics and Love. The fourth, bearing on Heaven, he has avoided, as though he would not care to enter into the sectarianism which would be inevitable in theological shambles. In the first chapter, however, he constantly keeps up the awareness of God, only there is nothing in it offensive to any religious sect. Vaḷḷuvar deals with generalities. In this respect he stands alone, as an ethical poet, among the poets of the world. His *Kuṟaḷ* is accepted by the Tamils as their sacred scripture.[1] Is it any wonder that it is recognized by them as one of the two mainsprings of their literature?

About the other didactic works of the period, there is nothing remarkable except in *Paḻamoḻi* which adds colour to the dry ethical sayings by introducing a telling proverb in each of its four-hundred quatrains. There is also some sort of arrangement of subject-matter in the work. But in the other works, we find merely enumeration of ethical ideas—three in *Tirikaḍuham*, four in *Nāṉmaṇi-k-kaḍihai* and *Iṉṉā-nāṟpadu*, five in *Siṟupañcamūlam*, six in *Ēlādi* and ten in *Mudumoḻi-k-kāñci*—in each stanza without any thought-connection. All these works except *Mudumoḻi-k-kāñci* are couched in *veṇbā* metre, the most apt medium of ethical thought. *Mudumoḻi-k-kāñci* is composed in *āśiriyam*. It is strange to hear that the production of these ethical works was necessitated by the lack of morals in the Tamil society.[2] We are even told that the lack of morals is due to the influence of foreign religions like Buddhism and Jainism.[3] The biased nature of such comments is too glaring. It must be remembered

[1] *Tiruvaḷḷuvamālai*, 4, 15, 18, 23, etc. [2] *Tamil Studies*, p. 193.
[3] Paṇḍārattār, *Tamiḻ Ilakkiya Varalāṟu* (A.D. 250-600), p. 24.

that the majority of these works, though they did not preach exclusively Jain morals were composed by Jain authors. Only three works, *Tiri-kaḍuham*, *Iṉṉā-nāṟpadu* and *Nāṉmaṇikkaḍihai* were written by followers of the Hindu religion. The Jains, like the Buddhists, lay particular emphasis on the moral conduct of man, and as such it is quite natural that they composed ethical works, perhaps supplying models for others to emulate.

4. The Silappadihāram of Iḷaṅgō

It is time now to consider the two epic-poems. *Silappadihāram*, reflecting the religious trends of the times, but with an inclination towards Jainism, is the first available great Tamil epic. Adiyārkunallār, the commentator of the work, calls it *iyal-iśai-nāḍaha-p-poruḷ-toḍarnilai-c-ceyyuḷ*.[1] He means by that a poetical work dealing with a story, with the elements of music and dance. The prefatory verse, however, calls it *urai-iḍaiyiṭṭa-pāṭṭuḍai-c-ceyyuḷ*, which means a poetical work interspersed with prose and lyrics. Both these terms are given up in favour of the more handy Sanskrit derivative *nāḍaha-k-kāppiyam* or the still shorter *kāppiyam*, meaning epic. And *Silappadihāram* is considered to be one of the five major epics in Tamil.[2] Whatever might be the conception of an epic in Sanskrit or Greek, *Silappadihāram* is certainly a noble story, told in a long and loose narrative, interspersed with digressions and lyrics Even among the Tamil epics it stands alone in the matter of technique.

The author of this epic seems to have been no ordinary bard, no poor dependent on royal favour, but a prince in his own rights. He is simply known as Iḷaṅgō or younger brother to the king. His brother Seṅguṭṭuvaṉ was ruler

[1] *Silappadihāram Uraippāyiram.* [2] *Tiruttaṇihai Ulā*, 526-7.

of the Chēra country. In this epic, he takes the opportunity[1] of telling us his interesting story. When very young, he must have been a lovely child. When he and his brother were together with their royal father, a fortune-teller, rather unwisely, praised his princely grace and prophesied that he would occupy the throne. That was no pleasant news to the heir-apparent, who was old enough to understand. Iḷaṅgō resolved that the hurt to his brother's feelings should be healed. He was not going to occupy the throne despite the soothsayer. Nor were his sons going to be the kings hereafter, for he was not going to have a family to injure his brother's interests. The vow of asceticism made on the spot and kept faithfully all his life earned for Iḷaṅgō the appellation Aḍihaḷ or Saint. For us he is simply the poet of *Silappadihāram.*

Who does not know Kaṇṇahi's story in Tamilnad? It is enacted on the stage in crude drama-form, with Kōvalaṉ as the licensed profligate, Mādavi, the avaricious prostitute, and Kaṇṇahi, the wronged wife, setting fire to a whole town because her good-for-nothing husband ended in disaster. It is known, with these characters, to grandmothers and children in ballad-form as *Kōvalaṉ-kadai.* A scape-goat is found for the guilt of its composition, as indeed for many other similar pieces, in the reputed Puhaḷēndi. In *Vaiśiya-purāṇam*[2] also, the same story occurs, but with some modification. The earliest known version of the story as given by Iḷaṅgō shows us quite a different Mādavi and is the only one to present the novel character of Kaundi Aḍihaḷ. The other characters also materially differ from the popular conception of them. Iḷaṅgō handles them more tenderly.

The plot of the story has been taken from local tradition[3]

[1] *Varandaru-kādai*, 171-183. [2] *Sarukkam*, 32. [3] Naccinārkiniyar, *Com. to Tol. Seyyuḷiyal*, 237.

with the three Tamil kingdoms as the scene of action. Both hero and heroine are from wealthy merchant-families. The poet slightly emphasizes the importance of the bride-groom's father, as though he felt it degrading for a man to wed above his status. The young couple are sent to keep house on their own account by thoughtful parents, as seems to have been allowed in noble families. Into a quiet and happy home, we find next the intrusion of a vice associated with luxury—the weakness for the accomplished prostitute. So Kōvalaṉ abandons Kaṇṇahi for Mādavi, the dancing girl. The much bedecked prostitute living in grand style and luring her young man to the fashion-resorts and bathing places of the time, is contrasted with the wan, patient wife who has in her husband's absence absolutely ignored her charms. Then, Kōvalaṉ and Mādavi fall out—a silly quarrel it would seem at first—over each singing love-lyrics not addressed to the other. But the fact is that Kōvalaṉ has lost faith in Mādavi and is suspicious of her loyalty. Kōvalaṉ is back at home, with his wife, who now prepares to follow him to the ends of the world. Mādavi's belated plea for reconciliation is rejected. Ruined in his career of profligacy, Kōvalaṉ accepts his wife's anklet to raise the money on which to build a fortune anew. For this purpose he travels with Kaṇṇahi to Madura, the Pāṇḍya's capital. On their long and tedious journey, Kaundi Aḍihal, a Jain nun, gives them the comfort of her company. In the city, Kōvalaṉ, now a truly repentant sinner, first entrusts his beloved wife to the care of Mādari and her daughter, these being poor and honest folk who would be sure to cherish her in his absence. He walks forth alone to seek out a jeweller who would help him to sell the anklet Here, he meets his fate. A goldsmith, who has misappropriated the queen's anklet and is in danger of incurring the king's

anger, sees here a golden opportunity. Kōvalaṉ is brought before the king as the culprit. Poor Kaṇṇahi's anklet resembling the queen's, his doom is sealed. He is executed. When the sorrowing wife arrives on the scene, she changes into a tigress at the injustice of the sentence. She proves her husband's innocence by bursting her anklet open before the king, revealing to him the diamond stones inside instead of the pearls which were in the queen's jewel. The shocked king is killed by remorse, and his queen becomes real *śati*, dying without a struggle. The widow's fury turns on the capital, the seat of crime and profligacy, and it goes up in flames. She then turns west to Cēranāḍ, where Kōvalaṉ, in a divine chariot, meets her on a hill and they are received up into heaven. A temple is built in Kaṇṇahi's honour in Vañci[1]. Seṅguṭṭuvaṉ, the Chēra king, has the stone for carving her image brought down all the way from the Himālayas on the shoulders of Aryan kings. Kaṇṇahi comes back to grace her temple with her presence, by now a full-blown deity.

The story is primarily the story of a woman. There is no hero except for the heroine. The heroine alone matters to the poet. Wedded in her twelfth year, beautiful with all the shy graces of a sheltered and beloved girl, she is so unblemished that she is the pride and toast, not of the men of her place, but only of the women who surround her with affection. To be an attraction to any man but her husband, is apparently a sin for a woman, the sin of which Sīta was guilty, but not Kaṇṇahi. Of how Kaṇṇahi receives her husband's wooing, we have no idea. She just does not speak at first. We may infer that she is a gracious silence, like Coriolanus' wife. Pining in Kōvalaṉ's absence, she is advised to undertake a pilgrimage. She replies briefly: 'It is not right'. Of course, silence

[1] Capital of the Chēras.

does not mean she has no ideas. She has a dream which she tells as briefly as possible to her confidante. She seems to have seen herself as the centre of the great drama in which she is so shortly to play a part. She only says, 'I think my husband will come. We walked to a great city in my dream and then, what I saw was ridiculous. There seemed to be a great disaster, probably fire', and shuts her mouth to more details. When Kōvalaṉ returns, if we expect a passionate scene of reconciliation, we are disappointed. There are no recriminations, no explanations. Kaṇṇahi simply offers her anklet when Kōvalaṉ confesses poverty. It is not correct to interpret that as an extravagant act of offering her husband money to spend on his prostitute. He is in genuine distress, and she is simply showing him a way out of it. How he is touched by her silent acceptance of him back to the shelter of her love, he reveals later in a passionate outburst of love. On the way to the great city, when they have not yet passed the limits of their own city, she asks like a child, 'How far is it yet to Madurai?' Once, we see her bustling about in her wifely devotion, preparing a meal for Kōvalaṉ, the last he was to take. But all her quiet beauty and silence serve as foil to the passion of her outburst in the Pāṇḍya's presence. True, when Kaṇṇahi merely smiles a sad smile in reply to her in-laws' sympathetic remarks about her loneliness, when she is a young deserted wife in her husband's home, great depths are suggested by the poet. Her quiet patience merely betokens depth, a depth of emotion dedicated purely to her husband and which could be stirred only where he was concerned. With his undeserved death, at the threshold of a promise of a better and happier life, that depth is lashed to storm.

Mādavi is privileged to attract. She is privileged to sell herself to the highest bidder, irrespective of the type

of man. She uses her privileges. Kōvalaṉ's wealth, apparently, is his real trap. But having bought her, his artistic mind quickly succumbs to the fascination of her pretty ways. She dances, sings and enslaves him with her moods. We catch him protesting, however, when she dances in public. How pretty is her sending the letter to Kōvalaṉ, written in a flower-petal, hidden in a garland! Poor Kaṇṇahi never wrote. Probably she was not expected to know to write. But once Mādavi was rejected, Kōvalaṉ was not to be tempted. Looking at the letter, he only commented acidly: 'Very pretty, like all her acting.' Actually that was shabby injustice to Mādavi, for she really loved him with all her heart, and after his death, caused by her own extravagances that drove him to sell jewellery in Madura, she atoned for her sin by turning nun, persuading the daughter she bore him to be a nun as well. Still we are glad she did not succeed in keeping Kōvalaṉ any longer from his wife. Only, it was not her fault that she was born a prostitute's daughter.

As for the hero, he is affectionate, brave, handsome and very accomplished. However, he is no proof against the vices of society, his very love of music and dancing drawing him towards accomplished womanhood. Kaṇṇahi is certainly not accomplished enough for him, and he has to suffer before he makes her sober, sterling qualities suffice for the needs of his poetic heart. And for Kōvalaṉ, the poet is not afraid of tainting his character with making him the centre of attraction for women. Many a woman may sicken for his love, he may think nothing of buying a mistress or abandoning his wife, but he is god enough for Kaṇṇahi. That he is sensitive to Kaṇṇahi's graces of character and that he loves her in his own poetic way, there is no doubt. After Mādavi's spell

has snapped, there is evidence of his even being purged into a firmer nature.

Of the minor characters, Kaundi Aḍihaḷ stands foremost. She is not a superfluity, though she finds no place in later versions of the story. She is not a mere instrument of Jain propaganda. In her ideas and in the way she responds to the grace and nobility of Kaṇṇahi, she seems to stand for the author himself. She takes with her an atmosphere of benignity. She officiates as Kaṇṇahi's protectress of her own accord, flying at the boors who have offended her darling charge. It is her officiousness, however, that makes the hero foolhardy enough to venture out alone from Mādari's house into the city of unknown peril, instead of seeking the more dependable help of his own merchant-class. Awareness of this, along with her grief for Kaṇṇahi's fate, drives her to seek death by fasting. To remove Kaundi would be to omit one very strong emotional factor from the story.

Iḷaṅgō makes the story look realistic by blending legend with historical facts. It certainly is a powerful tragedy, but the anti-climax is so long-drawn-out that the tragic intensity vaporises by the time the curtain falls. But the author is here concerned with the introduction of the new cult, the cult of the worship of the chaste woman. This cult, it is true, has its roots in the Sangam period itself and has now been absorbed into Hinduism by identifying Kaṇṇahi with Bhagavathi[1]. But, to Iḷaṅgō goes the credit of having cultivated it so elaborately as an independent cult in Tamilnad. The religious conditions of Iḷaṅgō's time are naturally reflected in his work. Saivism, Vaishṇavism, Jainism and Buddhism are shown by him as co-existing without disharmony. The poet's own strong and unmistakable inclination to Jainism does not make

[1] *Ilakkiyamaṇimālai*, p. 128.

him fling mud on other religions. There is a pronounced didactic element also in the story. The prefatory verse declares that the story is meant to teach three things, namely, Justice visiting the tyrant, the glory of chaste womanhood and the relentless nature of destiny. The epic closes also on an ethical note.

Few epics could have a more loose structure than *Silappadihāram*. Hardly one chapter resembles another. The narrative portion proper, which has a sustained grandeur of style, is in the *ahaval* or *āśiriyam* metre. One entire chapter is the ill-fated duet of Mādavi and Kōvalaṉ. The chapter on Mādavi's dance is filled with technicalities. Lyrics and prose are interspersed to avoid monotony. One important feature of the epic is this prose, the earliest available in Tamil, though it has all the beauties of alliteration, assonance and rhythm that we associate with poetry. Only the line-pattern is absent. Iḷaṅgō, at times, indulges in puns and lengthy metaphors, and his similes verge on conceits though the Sangam flavour is still present. His descriptions are too long with wearisome cataloguing of details, but are at times used to advantage in working up the required atmosphere.

The rounding up of the story, with the image of Kaṇṇahi in the centre, is worthy of special attention. Almost all the actors except the dead, are summoned to form part of the group-photograph that the poet has arranged, finding therein room for his own history. One real fault we would find in the work is the incredible amount of supernatural element, with over-emphasis on Fate. But that would be to ignore the taste of the times in which the great epic was born.

In *Silappadihāram*, then, it only remains for us to present, with all apologies to the author of the epic,

a few fragments of its wonderful lyrics in translation. The lyrics sing so naturally, and are so fresh and naive, that they could be compared to nothing in English except the strains of Burns. They are jets of pure song, and are indeed the chief ornament of the otherwise dignified, sedate, restrained narrative. Some of them are meant to be accompaniments to dances. In the main, these lyrics have a definite dramatic purpose, of either character-revelation or providing an atmosphere. No praise can be too high for the very last batch of songs, when the women whom Kaṇṇahi's death has left desolate come to the temple erected in her honour. One after the other, they introduce themselves, each in a little snatch of song, dignified, melancholy, touching, to the king, Seṅguṭṭuvaṉ, who is responsible for the temple. These songs are intensely personal, and their beauty is peculiarly tragic. The pathos of the story, partly forgotten by this time, returns with sudden force under their spell.

These two pieces are taken from the Mādavi-Kōvalaṉ duet:

1. 'Come not near her, lovely swan! You cannot show her gait.
   Come not near her, lovely swan! You cannot show her gait.
   Near her who splashes through the creeping waves,
   Come not you, O lovely swan! You cannot show her gait'.[1]

2. 'Holding the coral pestle in her hand,
   She pounds the pearly grain, with beautiful eyes,
   She pounds the pearly grain, with beautiful eyes,
   Not hyacinths, but cruel, cruel!

[1] *Kāṉalvari*, 23.

Beside the waves under the *punnai's* shade,
As the swan walks she walks, with beautiful eyes;
As the swan walks she walks, with beautiful eyes,
So deadly sharp, a Death, a Death!

The wine-filled blue flower in her hand,
She drives the birds from grain, with beautiful eyes,
She drives the birds from grain, with beautiful eyes,
Not shining swords, but piercing, piercing!'[1]

Kaṇṇahi, bereaved, wails thus, looking at the city that has treated her husband so unjustly:

'Are women here, are women here,
Who bear the affliction that has come to pain
Their husbands dear?

Are elders here, are elders here,
Who nourish with care and tenderness
The babes they bear?

Could God be here, could God be here,
Where the king swerved his sword to wrong,
In this city drear?'[2]

We are forced to give up further attempts at translating from Iḷaṅgō, but we take pleasure in being able to declare with truth that the quintessence of lyricism is in the lyrics of *Silappadihāram.*

5. Maṇimēhalai

Now we proceed to *Maṇimēhalai. Maṇimēhalai* and *Silappadihāram* are considered to be twin-epics. It has been said that the two together expound the four values of life —*aṟam, poruḷ, iṉbam* and *vīḍu—Silappadihāram* standing for the first three and *Maṇimēhalai* for *vīḍu* or

[1] *Kāṉalvari,* 20-22. [2] *Ūrśūḻvari,* 51-59.

attainment of heaven[1]. This would appear to be a strange agreement, for in *Maṇimēhalai*, all the religious tolerance and broadmindedness of her elder contemporary are thrown to the winds. In *Silappadihāram*, if any religion does have predominence, it is Jainism, though really ethics and religion are strictly subordinated to art, whereas in *Maṇimēhalai*, Buddhism is in entire command of the stage.

Indeed *Maṇimēhalai* looks like a pure mouthpiece of Buddhist propaganda. Sudamadi, one of the heroine's friends, tells us how her father was stabbed in the stomach and how the Buddhist monks received him into their protection, while the Jains spurned him from their door where he made his appearance holding his bowels with both hands[2]. All this propaganda, however, is the less convincing for its being mixed up with the most astounding fiction of supernatural things that the human imagination is capable of. Indeed, the Tamilian mind must have shown a remarkable appetite for an enormous quantity of fibs, to judge by the success the epic has enjoyed . Still, if we are to accept the prefaces to both *Silappadihāram* and *Maṇimēhalai*, the authors of both epics have had contact with each other, and if Iḷaṅgō accepted the statements of his contemporary Sāttaṉ without protest, it only shows the broad mindedness of the former.

Superficially, indeed, there are several points of comparison between *Maṇimēhalai* and *Silappadihāram*. Both are of thirty cantos each. Frequently, the same images, sentiments, phrases, sometimes, even the same clauses occur in both poems[3]. In general, Sāttaṉ's style is simpler though he also can be obscure when losing himself in technicalities, in his case, theological technicalities. Occasionally, he loves metaphor. The description of Puhār

[1] Aḍiyārkunallār, *Com. to Silappadihāram, Padiham.* [2] *Canto* V. 47-68. [3] Vaiyāpuri Piḷḷai, *Kāviyakālam*, pp. 152-157.

is one long-drawn-out metaphor. Sāttaṉ, like Ilaṅgō, relaxes into puns and cataloguing of details. But his descriptions can warm into a rare brilliance at times and are, generally, not tedious because of their brevity.

We now come to the story. Maṇimēhalai is the daughter of Kōvalaṉ and Mādavi. The repentant and sorrowing Mādavi has abandoned all the arts and luxuries of women of her profession and turned her daughter also to vows of austerity. All this is unwelcome to the public who miss their appearance on the stage in festive seasons. The attitude of the people shows how degraded the public were. But the beautiful Maṇimēhalai is firm in her pursuit of truth. She is in danger of but one distraction, the attention of the prince Udaya Kumaraṉ, to whom she finds herself drawn in spite of herself, for the reason that she had been his wife in former births. In fleeing from him, therefore, she is actually fighting herself, trying to free herself from the implications of human ties. Udaya Kumaraṉ's pursuit, however, is unrelaxing. Meantime, her guardian spirit, to help her in her struggle, bears her away from the zone of danger awhile, and when she comes back she is a chastened nun, bearing in her hands the bowl that will never fail to feed the poor. This change, however, is not taken seriously by Udaya Kumaraṉ. He gets himself involved in a serious scrape. Maṇimēhalai disguises herself as one Kāyasaṇḍihai to avoid him. He scents the trick and is after her. Kāyasaṇḍihai's husband, believing him in all earnestness to be making love to his wife, kills him on the spot. Now, as the cause for the prince's death, Maṇimēhalai is in prison where she finds a determined enemy in the bereaved mother. But the queen is quickly brought to her knees by Maṇimēhalai's miraculous escape from all assaults, and the king sets her free. Finally she joins her unfortunate mother, from

whom she had been separated by her guardian spirit, and then goes to the Buddhist sage and learns at his feet the way to salvation.

The main thread of the story sounds definitely interesting, but to extricate it from the mass of confusing details is quite a job by itself. The character of Maṇimēhalai, despite the assumed inner struggle, leaves only the impression of her beauty and her subjection to supernatural agencies.

If *Maṇimēhalai* fails to grip our interest like *Silappadihāram*, it is the heroine's own feeble character that is largely responsible. The story interest, as well as human interest, is lost in supernatural trends. We also miss the variety and the dulcet lyrics of *Silappadihāram*. Art is sacrificed here to propaganda and there is jarring sectarianism, ill-concealed. That is why *Maṇimēhalai* cannot stand comparison with *Silappadihāram* in the critical eye of posterity.

And yet, Sāttaṉār has his flashes of genius. Here is his picture of a garden with a lotus pond:

'The lisping beetle plays the harp;
The monkeys watch the stage where peacocks dance
In groves where sunbeams go not but *koils* go;
In the clear blue pond spread over with green leaves,
Where many flowers bloom, on one lofty flower,
The kingly swan is throned'.[1]

The poet goes on to elaborate the picture comparing all things of the woods to the accessories of the dancing hall. This picture is later crystallised nto a jewel of description by Kamban in an oft-quoted stanza[2]. Here again is a lovely simile of Sāttaṉ's, bearing the Sangam touch:

[1] IV, 4-10. [2] *Kamba-rāmāyaṇam, Bālakāṇḍam,* (Murray and Co., edit. 1958) *Nāṭṭuppaḍalam,* st. 4.

'The pale-faced Evening came, in the early grief
Of having bidden farewell to the Sun,
Like a dame who lost her husband in the home
She loved, and is to her parents' home returned'[1].

The epic shows, along with the glory of chastity and the king's justice, ideals like the renunciation of this world and the feeding of the hungry, for which the heroine stands. The Buddhist ideal of being detached from the world in spirit while serving all things living is preached. There is the tinge of the instability of life throughout. Pity to animals is emphasized, but very stinging satire is directed at some of the Jain ideals. This is how the author pictures a Jain ascetic:

'Having quite abandoned clothes and the sense of shame,
Mourning for lives not to be seen, with unwashed body.'[2]

A drunkard is made to give him this lesson:

'Let not your life that entered your dirty body
Grieve like a captive in a dungeon shut;
My Guru tells me the toddy from the palm
Gives us this life, the next, and endless bliss—
Besides is it murder, great sage, to drink?'[3]

The author of this poem, Sāttaṉār is known as the Cereal Merchant of Madura[4]. But Iḷaṅgō refers to him as 'Sāttaṉ, the Tamil Teacher'[5]. And that is all we know about him.

6. The Dawn of the Bhakti-cult

In the midst of these Jain-Buddhist influences, we find the beginnings of the Hindu religious revival. Sēkkiḻār

[1] V, 137-141. [2] III, 88-89 and 91. [3] Ibid, 94-99. [4] *Padiham to Silappadihāram*, ll. 88-89. [5] *Silappadihāram*, XXV, 66.

gives the names of about seventeen devotees who contributed to it[1]. Among them, Kāraikkāl Ammaiyār and Aiyaḍihaḷ Kāḍavar Kōṉ, deserve special mention. Kāraikkāl Ammaiyār, who is better-known, and probably the earlier of the two, was a native of Kāraikkāl. With all her religious inclinations, she was still fulfilling the duties of a devoted wife till her husband, scared by her unusual piety, left her. She then attached herself fully to the temple of Śiva at Tiruvālaṅgāḍ. Of her poems,[2] in her lyrics, we find a passionate appreciation of the dance of Śiva surrounded by the demons in the forest of Tiruvālaṅgāḍ. She has more or less identified herself with these uncanny spectators, thus giving rise to the legend that she changed herself into a demon on her husband's departure. In the midst of the stories associated with her name, it is clear that she was a literary force in the religious field and was the first noteworthy figure of the long line of Śaiva devotees of the Bhakti-cult. She shows originality in the choice of metre[3] and her lyrics paved the way for the hymns of the later Nāyaṉārs.

Aiyaḍihaḷ Kāḍavar Kōṉ is the author of *Kshētra Veṇbā* sung in praise of the Śiva of the temples he visited. This is of particular interest because we see for the first time a Pallava king expressing himself in Tamil. He urges the need for worshipping the feet of Śiva because of the instability of human life. He also spurns the luxuries of royalty for a devout life supported by alms.

Now, we shall take up *Paripāḍal* which is a partly religious and partly traditional work. It is a collection of poems in *paripāḍal* metre which provides for still more variety than *kali*. Of the seventy poems supposed to

[1] *Periyapurāṇa Ārāycci*, p. 99. [2] (i) *Mūtta Tiruppadiham*, (ii) *Tiru Iraṭṭaimaṇimālai and* (iii) *Aṟpuda-t-tiruvandādi.*

[3] A new *viruttam*, and *kaṭṭaḷai-k-kalittuṟai.*

have been included in this work, only twenty-four are extant in full. There are a few more in fragments. The bulk of these twenty-four is addressed to the Hindu gods and the rest are on the river Vaihai. In the latter, the love-theme is worked on a traditional line against the background of bathing festivities. In the religious poems there is no marked devotional fervour, the room being occupied by *purāṇic* stories and attributes of the Godhead found in the *Vēdas* and the *Upanishads*. One new feature of the poems is that they are intended to be sung in different tunes, though their lyrical quality is not worth mentioning.

7. Kalittohai

Among the conventional poems, *Kalittohai* certainly deserves the first place. It is a collection of 150 poems in *kali* metre, characterised by variety of pattern and lyrical grace. The first poem is an invocation to Śiva and the rest are love-poems divided into the five traditional divisions.

The background of these poems is the same as in Sangam poetry. For instance, we see in *Kuṟiñci-k-kali* often the image of the elephant fighting with the tiger, with the flaming *vēṅgai* flowers behind. Sometimes the tusker mistakes the golden-flecked *vēṅgai* for the tiger and attacks the tree, or the tiger mistakes the huge black stem for the elephant. But always the three are grouped together. The Sangam-cult of word-painting also is not given up in *Kalittohai*. But, sometimes materials for the images are drawn from *purāṇic* stories and even morals are read into the images. Here is one particularly beautiful image.[1] In the background are two cliffs and in the middle stands a *vēṅgai* tree flaming with yellow flowers. Water falls from the cliffs, spraying on the tree.

[1] *Kuṟiñci-k-kali*, 8.

The poet immediately transfers his mind to a sight familiar to the Hindu imagination, the goddess of prosperity, enthroned, with two elephants showering flowers on her from either side. In the presentation of the imagery, the Sangam habit of employing it for symbolism is here further cultivated. The moods of Sangam poetry also are here. The tone of *Kalittohai*, however, is different. Instead of the chaste, delicate treatment of love in Sangam poetry, we find a definitely realistic, occasionally coarse attitude. It is not always love between a sheltered girl under her maid's protection and a hero of the mountains, but often between man and woman among the labourers' classes. Actually, this is not accepted as love proper,[1] but is classed under *kaikkiḷai* and *perundiṇai*, being aspects of sex-attraction of an inferior nature. This takes us, therefore, to the life of the common people. It is bound to be interesting and spicy in spite of its coarseness.

Naturally, an entirely new element comes to be pronounced—that of the drama. Here is a racy dialogue between 'hero' and 'heroine', very much like a one-act play in miniature[2]. The woman, a cowherdess, protests against the boldness of the cowherd who does not allow her to get along.

'Who are you to stop me like this?' she asks. 'Move aside, you boor, decorated with flowers! My people don't want me to talk to you.'

He is ready with his reply: 'Do you know what my people have told me? They have told me not to let go a lovely girl with piercing eyes and painted shoulders.'

'Now that's clever of your people,' she replies. 'They have taught you to praise the eyes and shoulders of the pretty girls you see.'

[1] *aindiṇai.* [2] *Mullai-k-kali*, 12.

'It's kind of them certainly,' he says. 'Would they have been my relatives if they hadn't told me where to find you that have come here on the pretext of pasturing your cattle?'

'Sure, sure,' she retorts scornfully. 'But just you let me go.'

'Well, I'm not letting you go,' he answers. 'Your people have only forbidden you to talk to me. They haven't forbidden you to embrace me, have they?'

The dialogues run much in the same strain, with a complete absence of reserve and delicacy. But they are enlivened with broad jokes and witty repartee.

We may also glance over one of the narrative pieces beginning 'suḍar-t-toḍī kēḷāy'[1]. The heroine tells her attendant a secret. The young fellow in whom she is interested happens to come to her home, and asks for a draught of water. Nothing, of course, is more natural. The girl runs to bring the water, which is not exactly what the boy wants. When the mother is out of sight, he grips the girl by the hand. She screams in fright, and the mother comes running. But, by now the girl recovers her presence of mind, and not liking to tell tales, tells her mother that the water has gone the wrong way. The poor lady rubs the lad's back to assist it down, while he looks at the girl with a very knowing, laughing look! We find here a very good beginning for the short story in Tamil, which however, has not fulfilled its promise.

Some of the lyrics in *Kalittohai* are incomparable. Even to us, listening across a gap of fifteen centuries, there is an enchanting lilt and beauty in stanzas like the following:

[1] *Kuṟiñci-k-kali*, 15.

'āriḍai eṉṉāynī aravañcāy vandakkāl
nīraṟṟa pulamēpōl pulleṉṟāḷ vaihaṟai
kārpeṟṟa pulamēpōl kaviṉpeṟum akkaviṉ
tīrāmal kāppadōr tiṟamuṇḍēl uraittaikkāṇ.'[1]

The poets freely make use of all lyrical devices. Here is an instance of lovely repetition, full of liquid, haunting music:

'iḷamaḷai āḍum, iḷamaḷai āḍum,
iḷamaḷai vaihalum āḍumeṉ muṉgai
vaḷainehiḷa vārādōṉ kuṉṟu.'[2]

Here is another equally lovely:

'vaḷḷai ahavuvam vā, ihuḷainām
vaḷḷai ahavuvam vā.'[3]

Kalittohai marks a definite break from the clutches of Sangam convention, and the realisation of new possibilities in literature. It does not keep up the aesthetic levels of its predecessors, but it is still a considerable source of pleasure.

According to a stray quatrain[4], the five divisions of *Kalittohai* are ascribed to five poets of the Sangam period. But, not only the language of the poems but their tone would disprove this. Besides, the authenticity of the verse itself is questioned[5]. All the same, we see in *Kalittohai* the hand of different poets. Naccinārkiniyar, the commentator of the work, suggests this. While explaining a passage in *Kuṟiñci* 12, he quotes a line from *Pālai* 15, and says, 'So says another poet'. One thing at least is certain. Nallanduvaṉār is the author of the fifth division *Neydal* and the compiler of the whole work[6].

[1] *Kuṟiñci-k-kali*, 2. [2] Ibid, 5. [3] Ibid, 6. [4] Vaiyāpuri Piḷḷai, *Ilakkiya Tibam* (1952), p. 81. [5] Ibid, pp. 81 and 82. [6] Naccinārkiniyar, *Commentary to Neydaṟkali*, 25 and 33.

It is worthwhile to note here that both *Paripāḍal* and *Kalittohai* claim special connection with the Pāṇḍyas and their capital Kūḍal.

8. Miscellaneous Poems

The seven conventional poems[1] included in *Padiṉeṇ-kīḻ-k-kaṇakku* need no special notice, except for the fact of their being written in the *veṇbā* metre which has grown to be such a general favourite now. This metre has been used to advantage for traditional themes in *Muttoḷḷāyiram*. This is a collection of 900 *veṇbās*, of four to six lines each, composed in praise of the three Tamil kings. But only 109 verses are available now[2], 44 of which are on *puṟam*, dealing with the valour, generosity and prowess of the kings. The rest are on the *kaikkiḷai* theme, making the maidens of the country fall in love with the kings. This is indeed flattering to the kings' masculine vanity, but is hardly a compliment to the womanhood of the country. It shows only the unguarded susceptibility of youth. The redeeming feature, however, is the artistic blending of form and moods in the poems. There are also imaginative flashes as in

'The swans, scared that the water is on fire'.[3]

The Post-Sangam period shows, on the whole, the ancient culture of the Tamils slowly coming under Northern influence. In this age, though, the influence is more of Jainism and Buddhism than Brahmanism. May be the entry of the Pallavas and the Kalabhras and the resultant feeling of insecurity have combined with this

[1] (*i*) *Kār Nāṟpadu*, (*ii*) *Aindiṇai Aimbadu*, (*iii*) *Aindiṇai Eḻupadu*, (*iv*) *Tiṇaimoḻi Aimbadu*, (*v*) *Tiṇaimālai Nūṟṟaimbadu*, (*vi*) *Kainnilai* and (*vii*) *Kaḷavaḻi Nāṟpadu*. [2] *Hist. of Tamil Lang. and Lit.* p. 136; but Sēduragunādaṉ's edit. has 130 stanzas. [3] Muttukkaṇēsaṉ's edit. p. 23.

influence as well as native ideas of generosity and chivalry, of course, to promote the remarkable change in the outlook on life. The Sangam poets hardly ever preached, life having been beautiful in itself to them. How beautifully a Sangam poet has shown an old man's tender reminiscence of his innocent boyhood, when he dived into the water and triumphantly brought out sand to show the admiring girls on the shore![1] The Post-Sangam mentality, spurred by the consciousness of the instability of life, would have straightway proceeded thence to a sermon. We are prone in our day to regard ethical work with a tinge of contempt, but we must remember that the ethical strain of the Post-Sangam age is bound up intimately with the life of the people, and cannot be treated with a jest. Tiruvaḷḷuvar, for instance, is not the maker of proverbs. He is a seer who has directed Tamilian life when direction was most sorely needed. Through the ages, even when the people could no longer look for protection to their kings and evil days fell upon them, the faith of the sage in the beauty of human nature has been a beacon by which they guided their footsteps. He has not saved them from poverty and toil. Yet he has done a great thing—he has kept them, in the midst of poverty and toil, above the feeling of frustration that is the world's most deadly evil today.

The poetry of this age preserves the cosmopolitan nature of the best Tamil poetry. Iḷaṅgō was a prince; Tiruvaḷḷuvar was a *vaḷḷuva*. That is to be true to Tamil tradition, for the four hundred and sixty and odd Sangam poets had ranged from kings to potters and *kuṟavas*. This is a feature of Tamil that distinguishes it from Sanskrit which has been the literature of aristocrats, and this is certainly one of the reasons for the dynamic

[1] *Puṟa-nāṉūṟu*, st. 243.

nature of Tamil literature in general. In this age Tamil poetry reflects a marked stride in popular thought—the awakening of the ethical consciousness. And if in the next age we find the poets voicing the cry of their hearts in the longing for a personal God, that also, we shall acknowledge, is the most natural of developments. For the love of righteousness and spiritual hunger are closely allied. The poets have sung of the one; they must inevitably try to sing of the other.

IV. THE BHAKTI MOVEMENT

(600 A.D.—900 A.D.)

1. The Religious Background

AROUND 600 to 900 A.D. Tamilnad was mainly in the hands of the Pallavas in the north and the Pāṇḍyas in the south. Between the two there was perpetual strife. The Chōḷas, the Muttarayas and the Gaṅgas also were involved in this strife. The Chēras in the west come into the picture only occasionally. Our chief concern, however, is not the political conditions by themselves, but the religious trend of the times with which they were connected, for it was the latter that gave rise to the great body of devotional literature in Tamil.

Religion in the Sangam period had been quite subdued. From the literature of the times we can barely infer the presence of Brahminism as well as Buddhism and Jainism[1], alongside the indigenous religious practices of the Tamils[2]. In the next period, we can sense stronger undercurrents of religion. Buddhism and Jainism in this period deeply tint its literature. In spite of the rivalry between themselves, they were strong enough to be a powerful factor in society. The excesses committed in the name of these religions are said to have provoked other existing religions to resistance[3]. By the seventh century, the dormant elements of Brahminism which by now had accepted the Tamilian forms of worship, had been lashed into action. They won, we find, the

[1] *Padiṟṟuppattu*, st. 21 and *Paṭṭiṉappālai*, l. 53.

[2] *Aha-nāṉūṟu*, st. 22.

[3] *Taṇḍi Aḍihaḷ Purāṇam*, *Naminandi Aḍihaḷ Purāṇam* and *Mūrtti Nāyāṉār Purāṇam* of *Periya-purāṇam*.

patronage of the reigning monarchs. The Pallava king Mahēndravarman[1] and the Pāṇḍiyaṉ Neḍumāṟaṉ[2] were both converted from Jainism to Śaivism. Periyāḻvār, one of the Vaishṇavite saints, was patronised by a Pāṇḍya[3], and Tirumaṅgai Āḻvār served as chieftain under a Pallava king[4]. *Mutts*[5] and temples sprang up all over Tamilnad, built and munificently endowed by the kings[6]. Older temples were renovated[7]. The temples were provided, as a source of attraction to the laity, with prolific sculptural representations of *purāṇic* lore, which still continue to be admired by antiquarians and lovers of art[8]. But, perhaps, a greater religious force than these temples was the group of poet-devotees that they generated, who went about from temple to temple singing or chanting verses that they had themselves composed out of their own religious experience. With these poems, we come to a body of literature which was not merely an aesthetic cultivation but actually a great moving force in the lives of the people.

Worship in the temples had so far been conducted purely in Sanskrit, and was therefore beyond the comprehension of the average man. The hymns of the Nāyaṉārs and the Āḻvārs served the people much better as an outlet for their personal religious emotions. The simple Tamil in which they were couched came near to the heart of the layman. The deity Śiva, so far perhaps

[1] *Hist. of Tamil Lang. and Lit.* p. 104.

[2] Sadāsiva Paṇḍārattār, *Pāṇḍiyar Varalāṟu*, p. 25.

[3] Prefatory verse to *Mudalāyiram*, *Nālāyira-divya-prabhandam*, Pārthasārathi Ayyangār edit. (1939).

[4] *Sen-damiḻ*, Vol. XLV, p. 64.

[5] Rājamāṇikkaṉār, *Periya-purāṇa Ārāycci*, p. 224.

[6] Rājamāṇikkaṉār, *Periya-purāṇa Ārāycci*, pp. 106-121.

[7] Ibid, p. 111.

[8] Rājamāṇikkaṉār, *Pallavar Varalāṟu*, p. 299.

worshipped in *liṅgam* form and almost as an abstract godhead, took on a colourful, vital personality in these hymns, thus absorbing the attention of the people and awakening in them a deep interest. Even more absorbing was the personality of Vishṇu as manifested in the hymns of the Āḻvārs, in the role of child, lover and intimate companion to the people who worshipped him. In addition, countless stories were woven in the hymns round these personalities, interesting in themselves, and exciting to the simple and religiously inclined.

Another factor in these hymns which accounts for their hold on the people is their musical element. The weakest and dullest of these hymns are admirably adapted to old Tamil tunes or *paṇs*. Their authors had a very rare sense of rhythmic pattern with the result that songs like Sambandar's, which are often not very fine verse, yield admirably to musical rendering. Nor do these hymns hesitate to cater to the grosser feelings of the people. The Jains and the Buddhists are subjected to attack and vilification. But, perhaps, the chief attraction of these hymns is the sincerity and feeling they unfold. The best of them make very moving poetry.

This religious-literary movement, which we call the Bhakti-cult in Tamil literature, runs through two distinct channels, Śaivism and Vaishṇavism. In the beginning they run quite parallel, without any apparent conflict. But as the common cause weakened, and Buddhism and Jainism paled into the background, they developed a feeling of antagonism to each other[1], which was later on to reach the height of bitterness[2]. In this period,

[1] *Nāṉmuhaṉ Tiruvandādi*, st. 6.
[2] Nīlakaṇṭa Sāstri, *The Cōḷas*, (1955) pp. 644-45.

however, their mutual relationship was fairly pleasant, though of the two, it must be said, Śaivism was definitely the stronger movement, and it still continues to be so.

We will now approach the gifted authors of the *bhakti* movement. Their works are classed under two heads, the *Dēvāram* for Śaivite poetry and the *Divya-prabhandam* for Vaishṇavite poetry. These are, however, later names, the poems being originally known as *tiru-p-padihams*.[1]

2. Appar

Appar leads the train of poet-devotees in the Śaivite *bhakti* movement. He is also called Tiru-nāvukkarasu or the Holy Prince of Song. *Periya-purāṇam* says that he was a native of Tiruvāmūr of Tirumuṉaippāḍināḍ, and was a Vēḷāḷa by caste. He had originally been a Śaivite, but went over to Jainism where his merits placed him at the head of the Jain monastery in Tiru-p-pādiri-p-puliyūr. He is said to have been reclaimed to Śaivism on account of a miraculous cure of his stomach-complaint by his sister Tilahavadi who was a staunch Śaivite. His return to Śaivism subjected him to a good deal of persecution from the Jains. His having emerged unscathed from this, helped to convert the Pallava king of the time from Jainism to Śaivism. His life's work was chanting the praises of the deity Śiva, wandering from temple to temple. The fame of his prolific lyrical compositions soon spread throughout Tamilnad. He lived long enough to meet Sambandar, the young Śaiva prodigy, who hailed him as *appar* or Father. The appellation Appar has stuck. His real name, which is almost forgotten, was Maruḷ Nīkkiyār.

[1] Rājamāṇikkaṉār, *Periya-purāṇa Ārāycci*, p. 54.

The Pallava king whom Appar converted is identified as Mahēndravarman I[1]. Appar's junior contemporary Sambandar is said to have lived in the time of Narasimhavarman, son of Mahēndravarman I[2]. We may infer, therefore, that Appar belongs to the first half of the seventh century.

Appar is one of the three men of letters who composed the *Dēvāram*, and he is the best. His language comes nearest to the understanding of the masses, being simple, sweet and limpid. He has left to posterity 3066 verses —a considerable bulk of poetry though it is likely that he wrote much more. He is master of the verse-form called *tāṇḍaham*, with the long-drawn-out eight-foot line. A translation from one of the *tāṇḍahams* is attempted here:

'He is of Heaven; He is above the gods; He is Sanskrit and Tamil; and the four scriptures; He bathes in milk; He is the Lord; He is the woodsman who danced with fire in His hand; He is the One who blessed the woodsman; He is the honey that oozes within the lotus-heart of those who think of Him; He is the darling we may not attain; He is Śiva; He is the darling who dwells in Śivapuram.'[3]

In each of the *tāṇḍahams*, we observe the easy flow of accomplished prose; the cumulative effect achieved in some of the best poetry; genuine, simple feeling; and allusions to several of the stories in *purāṇic* lore. All these, in combination with music, make admirable singing for the gathering of Śaivite devotees.

[1] *A History of Tamil Literature*, Avvai. S. Doraiswami Piḷḷai, pp. 122-123.

[2] Ibid, pp. 53-60.

[3] Appar, *Dēvāra-p-padihaṅgaḷ*, Kaḻaham edit. (1928), p. 634.

Occasionally Appar's poems rise to a rare lyrical beauty, as in this marvellous stanza:

'māsil vīṇaiyum mālai madiyamum
vīsu teṉṟalum vīṁgiḷa vēṉilum
mūsu vaṇḍaṟai-p-poyhaiyum pōṉṟadē
īsaṉ endai iṇaiyaḍi nīḻalē.'[1]

To translate the untranslatable:

'The faultless *vīṇa*; the twilight moon;
The breeze that blows; the fragrant spring;
Bee-haunted pool: like these, the shade
Of my God's, my Father's twin feet.'

Of course, not all his songs, nor all the stanzas of a song, maintain this level. That would be next to impossible.

The following poem[2], equally well-known, beginning with the lines, 'nāmārkum kuḍi allōm, namaṉai añcōm,' strikes a triumphant note, asserting the Śaiva devotee's lot:

'Subjects to none are we; Death, we do not fear; we do not grieve in Hell; we never shake; we know no illness; we need not cringe; it's joy for us through life, not pain.'

Some of his pieces are a passionate prayer for the conquering of the senses, a prayer to realise the beauty of the image of the deity. He even overlooks the casteism fostered by the impact of Brahminism on the indigenous religion, as when he says that he sees God in the Pulaya or outcaste who worships His feet[3]. Of course, there is plenty of repetition of ideas and allusions, and occasionally, he is carried away by the images evoked by his

[1] Appar, *Dēvara-p-padihaṅgaḷ*, Kaḻaham edit. (1928), p. 357.
[2] Ibid, p. 664.
[3] Ibid, p. 657.

language. But, Appar is never quite so verbose or florid as his junior contemporary Sambandar. Many of his utterances come straight from the heart, and on the whole, he deserves his popularity apart from religious grounds.

3. Sambandar

Sambandar is, in point of time, the second of the authors of the *Dēvāram* and has left a body of 4158 verses though it is probable that he wrote much more. While his venerable senior contemporary Appar was, by reason of his reconversion from Jainism to Śaivism, as well as by the beauty and passion of his lyrics, the greatest literary force in the Śaivite religious movement, Sambandar's personality has attained, through the ages, the greatest stature. He is reported in a pretty story to have partaken of the milk of divine wisdom at the age of five. At the age of sixteen, it is said, he married and entered eternal bliss, not only with his bride but also with all those who attended the ceremony. The few years between, he spent in stormy disputes with the Jains, being responsible, if Nambi Āṇḍār Nambi's account[1] can be credited, for committing eight thousand Jains to the gallows. He is also said to have miraculously cured Pāṇḍiyaṉ Neḍumāṟaṉ of an illness, and won him over from Jainism to Śaivism, at the request of his queen. While many of these stories are rather tall, Sambandar was certainly a prodigy who died young. Later references to him almost always bear witness to his extreme youth. In one of his own most beautiful pieces, addressing the Pāṇḍya queen who patronised him, he counsels her not to lose heart on account of his tender years, though he was engaging in controversy with the veterans of the Jain

[1] *Āḷudaiya Piḷḷaiyār Tiru-ulā-mālai*, st. 59 and 74.

religion[1]. We may also accept that Sambandar, with a band of enthusiastic friends and followers, was partly responsible for the all but complete wiping out of Jainism as a religious force from Tamilnad. He is also said to have argued with Buddhists and won them over.[2] Sambandar was a Brahmin by caste. His native place was Sīkāḷi near Chidambaram. He was very widely travelled and widely acclaimed. He was never guilty, however, of modesty in his esteem of himself. He introduces himself as Tamiḻāharaṉ or 'the ocean of Tamil learning.'[3] Of his scholarship and literary gifts, however, one is of the opinion that posterity would be a better judge than Sambandar himself.

One is inclined to think that Sambandar was more of a scholar and musician than a poet. His hymns are indeed very powerful when set to tune—so well are they adapted to singing. Of the *paṇs* or tunes of the *Dēvāram*, nearly all—some 23—are represented in Sambandar's pieces. Of their musical value there can be no doubt. Assonance, alliteration, rhyme, rhythm, the free play of liquids and vowels—in handling all these tricks of the trade, Sambandar is a perfect master. Look at the measured ripples of sound in these lines:

'valamvanda maḍavārhaḷ naḍamāḍa muḻavadira
maḻaiyeṉṟañci
silamandi alamandu maramēṟi muhilpārkum
Tiruvaiyāṟē!'[4]

It is only in the fine touch, the sensitiveness of language in presenting a deep experience, that Sambandar pales beside Appar and some of the other religious poets.

[1] Sambandar, *Dēvāra-p-padihaṅgaḷ*, Kaḻaham edit. (1927) p. 629.
[2] *Periya-purāṇam*, *Tiru-ñaṉa-sambandar-purāṇam*, st. 904-925.
[3] Sambandar, *Dēvāra-p-padihaṅgaḷ*, Kaḻaham edit. (1927), p. 794.
[4] Ibid, p. 273.

There is abundant virility in his acrobatics of language, and the exuberance of his genius certainly shows great promise. He has attempted quite a number of metres, showing his familiarity with Sanskrit forms. Had he lived longer, perhaps, his language might have mellowed and taken on some of the graver graces, and his self-conceit also might have lost its edge. Considering his extreme youth, however, Sambandar's hymns are, in themselves, a miracle. In judging him as a musical composer, perhaps, we need not even make allowance for his youth.

Sambandar flings his unrestrained contempt of Buddhists and Jains in their teeth with absolute want of dignity, sneering at their names, their habits, their ways of eating and living and even their shaven heads[1]. The attack is directed more at the externals of their religion. Sambandar's poetry is said to have stimulated the currents of Saiva Siddhānta philosophy in Tamilnad, but one is disposed to believe that his youthful ardour, his brilliance in music and his reputation as a prodigy of scholarship were elements which contributed more to Śaivism, than the thought-content of his hymns.

Occasionally, there is a genuine literary flavour of the finer kind in Sambandar's poems. We will go through a translation of one of the lovely 'first' stanzas of his hymns, before we take leave of Sambandar:

'In the temple where he is throned, who bids us not lose heart,
In the hour when our senses grow confused, the way grows dim,
Our wisdom fails, and mucus chokes our struggling breath,

[1] Sambandar, *Dēvāra-p-padihaṅgaḷ*, Kaḻaham edit. (1927), pp. 629-631; 772-774 etc.

In Tiruvaiyār, where the girls dance round, and the drumbeats sound,
The monkeys fear the rain, run up the trees, and scan the clouds.'[1]

The monkeys, mistaking the drumbeats for thunder and getting needlessly worried, hint that at the hour of death we also worry unnecessarily about the unknown. The elaborate natural background in the Sangam tradition, with its suggestiveness, is characteristic of Sambandar.

4. Sundarar

Sundarar is the third of the *Dēvāram* trio. His verses —1000 in number—among the sweet serious verses of Appar, and the deft literary compositions of Sambandar, provide variety and immense entertainment. They are in a class by themselves, Sundarar's approach to God, having nothing comparable in literature. He is called Vaṉtoṇḍar or the Insolent Devotee, and Tambirāṉ Tōḻar or the Lord's Comrade. There are several stories about Sundarar, and though they are mostly myths, they amply illustrate the nature of the relationship Sundarar sought to maintain with his deity. Sundarar was about to be married. Just before the marriage rituals started, the bridegroom got a shock. A stranger entered demanding absolute possession of his person. He produced a palm-leaf script whereby his claim was proved as Sundarar's master. As you can imagine Sundarar protested. It was no cool or dignified protest. The case went to court. Sundarar tore up the leaf, but his master coolly presented another, saying it was the copy that had been destroyed. Sundarar left the court a confirmed slave, but was astoun-

[1] Sambandar, *Dēvāra-p-padihaṅgaḷ*, Kaḻaham edit. (1927) p. 273.

ded to find that his master disappeared when they neared the Śiva temple at Tiru-veṇṇai-nallūr. Anyway, the runaway bridegroom now turned a Śaiva devotee, but he was soon to find ample diversion in his new vocation. At Tiruvārūr he married a temple-girl and at Tiru-oṟṟiyūr, a Vēḷāḷa girl, and though he promised to be faithful to the latter, he did return to his other flame. These two women, Paravai and Saṅgili, occupied a big portion of the life of this man, who certainly did not count austerity among his ideals. Between the two he was shuttlecocked and he did not hesitate to drag Śiva into the midst of his matrimonial complications. Naturally, he found dissentients even among Śaivites, one of whom chose to die rather than be healed by the miracle-touch of such a man[1]. Sundarar's ideals were not lofty—and in an age on which Buddhism and Jainism had cast their shadow, they look rather tawdry. He asks the deity for a gold-headed cane and a scarf, rice and curry and ghee thrice a day, and perfumes.[2] In other words, he asks for the good things of life, insolently reminding the deity, 'You know, of old there was this agreement between us,'[3] referring to the time when he gave himself up to his new vocation. The tone he uses is that of a licensed friend. Why, he even takes upon himself to command the deity:

'Tell the crocodile to release and give back that child'[4].

Or this, which is worse:

> 'I have managed to get some paddy; there is none to carry it home; therefore command that it be taken home'.[5]

[1] *Periya-purāṇam, Ēyarkōṉ Kalikkāma-nāyaṉār Purāṇam.*
[2] Sundarar, *Dēvāra-p-padihaṅgaḷ*, Kaḻaham edit. (1929), pp. 108-111.
[3] Ibid, *padiham* 46 : st. 5.
[4] Ibid, *padiham* 92 : st. 4. [5] Ibid, *padiham* 20.

Such an address, made in all seriousness, provokes an outburst of laughter from us, but the author is undaunted.

Sundarar met with a serious affliction—the loss of his eyesight. He takes it as a punishment meted to him for breaking his vow of fidelity to Saṅgili. On this occasion he makes a very touching address to Śiva, though the same familiar tone is preserved:

'I erred, believing that He would forgive'.[1]

That, by the way, is a fine excuse.

"You feared not blame, but you have with a film
Obscured my eye; you, with the dangling ear-jewels!
I asked, 'Are you within the temple?' Then,
He from within replied, 'Go, We're here,'
He with a deer upon His palm.'"[2]

'How', he asks in another poem, 'can I bear it if the womenfolk of my house slight me as a blind fellow?'[3] 'O three-eyed One, if you are determined to take my eye, can you not at least give me a staff?'[4]

His affliction had not, however, cured him of his insolence and impertinence. He goes on:

'I was sold and bought by you; I am no loan; of my own will I am your slave. I did no wrong. You made me blind! Why, Lord, did you take away my sight? The blame is yours alone! If you will not restore the sight of my other eye, well, may you then live long!'[5] The curse implied in the last clause is the last thing we can imagine in such a prayer.

[1] Sundarar, *Dēvāra-p-padihaṅgaḷ*, Kaḻaham edit. (1929), *Padiham* 89 : st. 1.

[2] Ibid, *Padiham* 89 : st. 1.

[3] Ibid, *Padiham* 54 : st. 9.

[4] Ibid, *Padiham* 54 : st. 4.

[5] Ibid, *Padiham* 95 : st. 2.

In the midst of such material, which astounds us, as well as provokes admiration, we also find interspersed some very lovely pieces. That beginning 'poṉṉār mēṉiyaṉē'[1] is equal to anything attempted by Appar himself. The hymn on Kacci-aṉēhadaṅgāvadam[2], for sound arrangement and keeping time, stands comparison with Sambandar's. 'Tillai vāḻ andaṇar tam aḍiyārkum aḍiyēṉ'[3] is one of his best-known and loveliest pieces. It is here that Sundarar mentions the names of the Śaiva devotees at whose feet he was serving. But, it is not these that bear the stamp, the characteristic touch, of 'Vaṉ-toṇḍar' or the Insolent Devotee.

Sundarar is said to have died at the age of eighteen. But apart from the witness that his life-history bears to the contrary, he himself in a poem hints at the ripe old age he attained[4]. In his *Tiru-t-toṇḍa-t-tohai*, he indicates that he lived in the time of the Pallava king Kaḷar-c-ciṅgaṉ who is identified with Narasimhavarman II of the late seventh and early eighth century.[5]

5. Māṇikka-vāsahar

We have just considered the *Dēvāram* poets. Now, we will proceed to Māṇikka-vāsahar or the Speaker of Gems, the greatest of the Śaivite mystics. He comes after the three in point of time. Had it been otherwise, it would be difficult to account for the omission of his name in the list of Śaivite sages given by Sundarar.

[1] Sundarar, *Dēvāra-p-padihaṅgaḷ*, Kaḷaham edit. (1929), *Padiham* 24 : st. 1.

[2] Ibid, *padiham*, 10.

[3] Ibid, *Padiham* 39.

[4] Ibid, *Padiham* 60 : st. 2 and 7.

[5] *Tamiḻ-p-poḻil*, III, pp. 201-209.

Strangely enough this list has been faithfully and unquestioningly copied by later enthusiasts[1] as well. He is mentioned, however, by Nambi Āṇḍār Nambi.[2] That brings his date somewhere between the eighth century and the tenth century. Māṇikkavāsahar himself refers to one Pāṇḍiyaṉ Varaguṇaṉ 'who worshipped at Chidambaram'[3] as his contemporary. There were two Pāṇḍya kings of the name, and Māṇikkavāsahar seems to point to the first who lived in the first half of the ninth century,[4] as he was a great Śaivite devotee.

There are several works, both in Sanskrit and Tamil, from which we can gather the history of Māṇikkavāsahar. It is tough work disentangling fact from myth, and of these works, the *Tiruvādavūr Purāṇam* is the earliest and the least unreliable. Māṇikka-vāsahar's real name is forgotten. It would appear that he was a Brahmin and that he was born at Tiru-vādavūr near Madura. Hence, he is referred to as Vāḍavūrar or 'He of Vādavūr'. The story runs that he was the Pāṇḍya king's minister, but surrendered to the influence of a Brahmin *guru* whom he met at Tiru-p-perunduṟai and renounced his worldly ambition on the spot. He took the Brahmin *guru* to be Śiva Himself. Thenceforward, Māṇikka-vāsahar's life was one of visiting the Śiva temples and giving the world his priceless gems of song. He too, like Sambandar, is said to have defeated the Buddhists in controversy.

Māṇikka-vāsahar's works are *Tiru-k-kōvaiyār* and *Tiruvāsaham*. *Tiru-k-kōvaiyar* belongs to the *kōvai* class of

[1] Nambi Āṇḍār Nambi and Sēkkiḻār.

[2] *Kōyil Tiru-p-paṇṇiyar Viruttam*, st. 58.

[3] *Tiru-k-kōvaiyār*, st. 306 and 327.

[4] Avvai S. Doraiswāmi Piḷḷai, *A Hist. of Tamil Lit.*, pp. 309-310.

verse which treats of the Sangam love-theme, with this difference, namely, that it reads like a continuous story. But the love depicted in *Tiru-k-kōvaiyar* is the love between God and the soul. How far the adaptation of this theme to a religious purpose has succeeded, is doubtful. Yet, *Tiru-k-kōvaiyār* has a definite finish of form and stands first, though not in point of time, among the *kōvais*. But it cannot be compared to *Tiru-vāsaham* where we have the outpourings of the poet's heart.

In *Tiru-vāsaham* we discern the ripening of the Śaiva Siddhanta philosophy whose beginnings were noticed in the works of the earlier Śaivite saints. *Tiru-vāsaham* teaches that Śiva, through grace, seeks out in the form of a *guru* those who seek Him. Of course, the emphasis is on *bhakti* or devotion. Indeed, Māṇikka-vāsahar is best fitted to speak of this, because that was the only way he knew. Still, the philosophic content is so considerable that it has been called philosophy in hymn form.

Māṇikka-vāsahar gives the impression of having prostrated himself at the feet of his deity. In this posture of self-abasement, he maintains a sweet communion with the God of his soul. He has shunned and spurned the world. His soul literally melts and flows towards his God. A great wave of emotion sweeps through *Tiru-vāsaham*. The autobiographical element is unmistakable. So is the strength of the passion behind it. It is not isolated instances of beauty or sweetness that we find in *Tiru-vāsaham*. The entire book is poetry of a very high order. Of the four Śaivite mystics, Māṇikkavāsahar is the greatest poet. The Rev. G. U. Pope has taken immense pains to introduce him to the English reader through translations. But it is not translation that does a poet justice.

If the song element is more pronounced than poetry in Sambandar's verses, the contrary is true of Māṇikka-vāsahar. One reason for this may be that the verses of the earlier mystics were intended for congregational singing or for chanting by bands of devotees from temple to temple. Māṇikka-vāsahar's poems were simply offerings of his own soul laid at the altar of his deity, and not intended for congregational singing. The personal element is, therefore, infinitely more marked than in the other mystics. True, Māṇikka-vāsahar has imitated popular songs. Refrains of popular songs have suggested the titles for some of his pieces, like 'Our Lady Fair, Arise', or 'And Breathe His Praise, O Humming Bee!' But a more plausible reason is that Māṇikka-vāsahar's soul was more gifted with genuine poetic sensibility. Between Māṇikkā-vāsagar's songs and Sambandar's, there is all the difference between the versification of *In Memoriam* and one of Swinburne's poems. The earnestness, sincerity and pathos of the former stand revealed in every articulate syllable, the very subject-matter of the latter being washed away in a dizzy swirl of sounds, though musical sounds. Another difference between Māṇikka-vāsahar and Sambandar is the self-abasement in which the former indulges. Throughout an attempt is made to 'increase' the glory of his deity, and to 'decrease' his own self, as the apostle would say. This trait is not so conspicuous in the other three great mystics. 'Me, iron-hearted and deceitful one'[1], he calls himself, in the tone of John Bunyan calling himself a sinner. It is not to be accepted that Māṇikka-vāsahar was iron-hearted and deceitful any more than Bunyan was a sinner.

Māṇikka-vāsahar is a past master in his art. Of the 51 poems of *Tiru-vāsaham*, not one is without a beauty

[1] *Tiru-vāsaham: Tiru-c-cadaham*, 80.

of its own. But, one feature is common—the poet tries to reach his God by melting in tears at His feet. Some of the refrains run in this strain:

'Master! Thy slave, I Thee my refuge make!'[1]
'Behold, O Sire, my melting soul hath yearned!'[2]
'Transcendent One! ...
Thou see'st to none but Thee I cling!'[3]

In one poem he demands of God how He is going to leave him, because,

'I've seized Thee—hold Thee fast!'[4]

Now and again, he goes on philosophic flights:

'He is the Ancient One, Who creates the Creator of all;
He is the God, Who preserves the Preserver of things created;
He is the God who destroys the Destroyer;
But, thinking without thought, regards the things destroyed'.[5]

More often, his philosophy merges into poetry:

'In the sacred moon He placed its coolness;
Kindled in mighty fire its heat;
In ether pure He placed pervasive power;
Endued the ambient wind with energy;
To streams that gleam in shade their savour sweet,
And to the expanded earth its strength He gave'.[6]

1 Pope's translation of *Tiru-vāsaham*, XXIV.
2 Ibid, XXV, st. 8.
3 Ibid, XXVIII, st. 1.
4 Ibid, XXXVII.
5 Ibid, III, ll. 13–16.
6 Ibid, III, ll. 21–26.

Many of his poems are on the level of ecstasy. In the *embāvai* pieces he conceives of the god being worshipped by maidens, and the poem is in the form of bidding a maiden arise at dawn and join in the bathing celebration. The *kuil* stanzas, some of them very lovely, take the form of a girl's request to the cuckoo, to call to her side her Divine Lover. Māṇikka-vāsahar's poetic forte is not any brilliant flash of imagery. Nor is it in particularly enchanting music. The poems are comparatively bare and subdued as song when set by the side of the other mystics' pieces. They have not been set to tune for congregational singing. But the bareness is not one of poverty. It is that of a soul relying on its own strength and not on show for making its impression. In Māṇikka-vāsahar we find, more than in the others, an intimate personal experience of the godhead and the ecstasy born of it. There is a newness even about his handling of the ancient Sangam method. There is, more than in the others, a decided literary flavour about his poems, a chastity of diction and a fineness of philosophical thought which is not mere abstract truism.

In the work of all these poets, the autobiographical element is present. Love-poetry in the Sangam tradition is admirably adapted to devotional themes. The dominant note is that of praise. But, if the trio of *Dēvāram* were responsible for the growth of the Śaivite *bhakti* movement, Māṇikka-vāsahar could be called the culmination of the movement. So superior is his writing to theirs.

6. Minor Śaivite Poets

Side by side with the *bhakti* movement, we find the beginnings of the *yogic* movement. *Tiru-mandiram*, written by the famous Yōgi Tiru-mūlar, is its first and

best representative. It contains nine sections of more than 3,000 quatrains in *kali-viruttam* metre. It appears to have drawn its materials from the nine ancient *āgamas* on Śiva and may be itself called the first *āgamic* or scriptural work in Tamil. The Śaiva Siddhānta philosophy as such takes its origin from this, the word Siddhānta itself being used for the first time here. In spite of the simple style, *Tiru-mandiram* is very often obscure because of its technical nature. Tiru-mūlar might have lived in the second half of the seventh century as he prays to Vināyaka in the invocatory stanza, and as he is mentioned by Sundarar in his *Tiru-t-toṇḍa-t-tohai*[1].

There is a miscellaneous group of versifiers of less consequence, belonging to this Śaivite group. These poets could none of them have been great forces in the *bhakti* movement. In the first place, their devotional experience, as revealed in their poems, is not impressive. Then, their choice of metre is not very happy, the poems being rigid and not easily adaptable to music. They are feeble imitators of Sangam poets. Their language is highly artificial and without the fine touch to redeem it. We must be thankful to them, however, for the new verse-forms[2] that they have introduced.

Among these lesser satellites, Cēramāṉ Perumāḷ Nāyaṉār and Nakkīradēva Nāyaṉār deserve special mention. Cēramāṉ Perumāḷ Nāyaṉār is a distinct personality among the Śaivite bards in that he was no commoner, but the king of Cēranāḍ. Sēkkiḻār says that his name was Perumākkōdai and his capital was Koḍuṅgōḷūr or Mahōdai. He is mentioned as the friend and companion of Sundarar. The two are said to have visited temples together. Strangely enough, Cēramāṉ Perumāḷ does not even men-

[1] st. 5.

[2] *ulā*, *mummaṇi-k-kōvai*, etc.

tion Sundarar. Sundarar, indeed, in his list of Śaivite devotees, speaks of the former as the 'one who knows the languages of all things alive'[1]. This gives a valuable clue to Cēramāṉ Perumāḷ's time. He might have been Sundarar's contemporary.

Besides the rather insignificant *Tiruvārūr Mummaṇi-k-kōvai*, his works are *Poṉvaṇṇa-t-tandādi* and the distinguished *Ādi Ulā* or the First Ulā. *Poṉvaṇṇa-t-tandādi* is more musical and of finer workmanship, but *Ādi Ulā* decidedly is a more ambitious piece. Cēramāṉ Perumāḷ's chief achievement is his innovation of the *ulā* as a distinctive form of literature. The *ulā* or the description of the king's procession is already suggested in *Mu-t-toḷḷāyiram*, but has first been elaborated and diverted to a religious purpose by Cēramāṉ Perumāḷ. We will take a glance at his *ulā*. In Mount Kailas, Śiva, upon the request of his devotees, goes round in procession, royally bedecked. The women in Kailas are all eyes to take in his royal splendour. As he passes in state, girls and women of different ages, react differently. Their reaction is the subject-matter of *Ādi Ulā*. The poem has been interpreted as the presentation of the relationship of God and the soul as Lover and Beloved. It must have been so intended, but we have to be told this to recognize it as such. We are first struck only by a rather detailed study of the graces of womanhood, in different stages, at times, even overstepping the bounds of good taste. The poem has, however, been called *Ñāṉa Ulā* or 'the Ulā of Divine Wisdom'. The earlier part of it is indeed devoted to philosophising[2]. Śiva is called the Great One Whose form was uncreated or unborn, the One Who rose without being raised by Fate, the One Who can

[1] *Tiru-t-toṇḍa-t-tohai*, st. 6.
[2] *Ādi Ulā*, st. 1-8.

be smaller than the smallest, the One Who is also the Three—Creator, Preserver and Destroyer. One is struck by a note from the *Bhagavat Gīta* when the poet calls Śiva the One Who condescends to appear in the heart of His devotee in whatever form the latter might choose to contemplate Him.[1] The whole is couched in the long-drawn-out *kali-veṇbā* metre and is worked out in a dignified classical style. But, beyond that, there is little to say.

Nakkīradēva Nāyaṉār can boast of a considerable volume of output[2] and he shows a genuine inclination for Nature-description, after the manner of Sambandar, in his *Tiru-īṅgōy-malai-eḻupadu*. In *Kār-eṭṭu* he sees Nature as a revelation of God.

In the *Eleventh Tirumuṟai* where the chronological order is more or less observed, the poems of Nakkīradēva Nāyaṉār, Kallāḍadēva Nāyaṉār etc., find a place between those of Cēramāṉ Perumāḷ and Paṭṭiṉattār. Hence, they can be assigned to the eighth or ninth century.

7. Minor Vaishṇavite Poets

Now, we shall consider the Vaishṇavite movement which produced the *Divya-prabhandam*. Twelve poets are represented in it. They were called the Āḻvārs by later generations. Āḻvār, we presume, means one who is sunk in the beauty and glory of his Lord. Not all of the twelve Āḻvārs mean anything great in the world of Tamil literature, however, though they were all great influences in the Vaishṇavite world.

[1] *Ādi Ulā*, st. 7.

[2] (*i*) *Kayilai-pādi Kāḷatti-pādi Andādi*, (*ii*) *Tiru-īṅgōy-malai-eḻupadu*, (*iii*) *Tiruvalañcuḻi Mummaṇi-k-kōvai*, (*iv*) *Tiruveḻu-kūṟṟirukkai*, (*v*) *Perundēva-pāṇi*, (*vi*) *Kōpa-p-pirasādam*, (*vii*) *Kār-eṭṭu*, (*viii*) *Pōṟṟi-k-kaliveṇbā* and (*ix*) *Tirukkaṇṇappadēvar Tirumaṟam*.

Poyhai, Pūdam and Pēy come first in point of view of time. The Vaishṇavite hagiology mentions the three as the first Āḻvārs and groups them together as contemporaries.[1] The field of their activity, we know, was Toṇḍaināḍ or the Pallava country. Their period must have been after the middle of the seventh century, when the present Mahāpalipuram came to be known as Mallai,[2] for it is by this name that Pūdam refers to it. Since Poyhai and Pēy refer to Viṇṇahar[3], the three Āḻvārs might be assigned to early eighth century.

The three poets have left hundred *veṇbās* each in *andādi* arrangement, in praise of Vishṇu. We discern no individuality in the style of any of the three, though Poyhai shows a decided philosophical inclination. It has been suggested that Pūdam shows more of devotion and Pēy of zeal, but their verses do not anywhere show more warmth than Poyhai's. The *veṇbās* are not, however, incompetent work, in spite of occasional liberty taken with the metre[4]. Still, there is not on them the stamp of great literature.

Next, in point of time, comes Tiru-p-pāṇāḻvār[5]. He has left only one piece. It is a description of Vishṇu from head to heel, and with the mention of each feature he shows his longing for the deity after the fashion of a girl pining for her lover:

[1] *Guru-parambarā-prabhāvam*, S. Krishṇamāchāriyar edit. (1927), p. 11.

[2] Rājamānikkaṉār, *Pallavar Varalāṟu*, p. 130.

[3] This Viṇṇahar is said to be Paramēsvara Viṇṇāharam built by the Pallava king Paramēsvara II (705-710 A.D.)

[4] *Commentary to Yāpparuṅgalam*, p. 350.

[5] The chronological arrangement of the Āḻvārs is based on the arrangement in the *Irāmāṉusa Nūṟṟandādi*.

'O His red lips! They have stolen my heart';[1]
or,
'His large eyes have made a fool of me'.[2]

There is some warmth of feeling and pleasant music in his lyric, but this is a poem, which, perhaps because of the religious sentiment attached to it, has been over-praised. Its author, as we may infer from his name, belonged to the Pāṇa or minstrel community, by now considered degraded in Tamil society. Class-distinctions, we can sense, are gradually becoming strong in society, though not present in the life of real devotees. There is a story of how, not being admitted into the temple, Tiru-p-pāṇāḻvār yearned for a glimpse of the image of his deity in Srīraṅgam as he stood on the opposite side of the river Kāvēri.

Tirū-maḻisai Āḻvār may be taken up next. Probably he was a junior contemporary of the first three Āḻvārs. He is said to have met them in Tiru-vallikkēṇi. His *Nāṉmuhaṉ Tiruvandādi* consisting of one hundred *veṇbās* easily falls into the group of verses of Poyhai, Pūdam and Pēy. In only one way does it stand apart, namely, the new element of anti-Śaivite bigotry which is creeping into the Vaishṇavite movement. As against the open mind of Poyhai who regards Śaivism in the same light as Vaishṇavism[3], we have the narrow fanaticism of Tiru-maḻisai who says that

'The Jains are ignorant; the Buddhists have forgotten
God;
The Śaivites are small men'.[4]

1 *Amalaṉādipirāṉ*, st. 7.
2 Ibid, st. 8.
3 Poyhai, *Mudal Tiruvandādi*, st. 5.
4 *Nāṉmuhaṉ Tiruvandādi*, st. 6.

Tiru-maḷisai's *Tiru-c-canda-viruttam* is noteworthy for its *sandam* or rigidly set pattern of rhythm, the form in which Aruṇahiri of the fifteenth century excelled. *Tiru-c-canda-viruttam* is a long and ambitious piece crammed with religious philosophy and it is beyond the understanding of those who come to it for the sake of poetry. What else are we to say about a poem running in this strain?

> 'Mysterious One, who art the five from touch to sound,
> The truth and the falsehood, and the varied wisdom,
> The six and six and six, and the five and five and five,
> The two and three, the seven and six and eight'.[1]

It is a far cry from this to the best and noblest of Vaishṇavite literature. As in all poetry, the heights are reached only where the intimate chords of feeling are sounded, not when the poets indulge in such philosophical abstractions.

Viprā-nārāyaṇa or Toṇḍar-aḍi-p-poḍi-āḻvār is the sixth in the list. He has left two poems. One is in the form of *Paḷḷi-eḻucci* or a request to the deity to wake from His sleep. This is another instance of adaptation of the old form *tuyil-eḍai-nilai*[2] to suit the present need of religion. It is a lyric of ten stanzas of four long lines each, with the refrain, 'God of Srī-raṅgam! Deign to arise from sleep'. It is more than competent, and even beautiful at times in the description of morning. We can sense in it a literary flavour rather than purely religious zeal. A longer poem in a different strain is his *Tiru-mālai* or Holy Garland. The stanzaic forms used in this poem bear a strong resemblance to Appar's *tiru-nērisai* and *tiru-k-kuṟun-dāṇḍaham*. Here we find the poet trying

[1] *Tiru-c-canda-viruttam*, st. 2.
[2] *Tol-kāppiyam*: *Puṟattiṇai Iyal*, 36.

to lose himself in ecstatic contemplation of Vishṇu. The poem is a quaint mixture of ardent adoration, bigotry and poetry. 'The eyes that saw Krishṇa—an incarnation of Vishṇu—drop dew' [1]says he. The only God according to him is the God who conquered Lanka with His bow,[2] meaning Rāma, another incarnation of Vishṇu. 'I, a sinner, have come to thee'[3], he cries. 'How', he asks himself, 'can I forget Him and live?'[4] Into this fabric of piety he has woven his most strong prejudice against the non-Vaishṇavites. 'Throw to the dogs', he says, 'the food of those who do not call upon Vishṇu'[5]. 'Jainism and Buddhism,' he says, 'are untouchable'[6]. His tone is almost that of Sundarar when he addresses Vishṇu, saying that the latter is perhaps fond of the lazy ones who sit at his gate controlling their five senses[7]. Emphasis is laid on the importance of *bhaktas* or devotees. Toṇḍar-aḍi-p-poḍi is himself the devotee's devotee, or the one who is 'the dust of the feet of devotees', as his name suggests. Devotion to Vishṇu, according to him, is everything. 'Those who bear Thee in mind' he says, 'even if they were guilty of the slaughter of all things living, would not reap the fruits of their crime'.[8] Indeed, the contrast between the ages of Vaḷḷuvar and the religious movement in Tamilnad is striking here. In the age of Vaḷḷuvar, the emphasis was mainly on ethics, though allegiance to a vaguely conceived

[1] *Tirumālai*, st. 18.
[2] Ibid, st. 7.
[3] Ibid, st. 32.
[4] Ibid, st. 23.
[5] Ibid, st. 14.
[6] Ibid, st. 7.
[7] Ibid, st. 38.
[8] Ibid, st. 40.

godhead was not rejected. In the age of the religious movement, the emphasis is shifted completely to devotion to a personal God, a God with a very strongly conceived personality to the exclusion of all other interests. Ethics are generally ignored though not often slighted as we have just observed in Toṇḍar-aḍi-p-poḍi Āḻvār.

8. Kulasēharāḻvār

Now, we come to Kulasēharāḻvār. He calls himself king of Kolli, Koṅgu, Kūḍal and Kōḻi, meaning thereby king of the three Tamil kingdoms. This could have been possible only towards the close of the eighth century A.D.[1] He has left only a slender sheaf of verses, but in spite of that reason could be ranked with the major poets of the Vaishṇavite movement. He is one of the few Tamil kings who threw themselves heart and soul into the currents of Vaishṇavite religious fervour. To him may be ascribed the foundation of Rāma-worship in Tamilnad, for though he was attracted to the Krishṇa incarnation, his verses on Rāma are among the most fascinating ones on the subject in Tamil before the days of *Kamba-rāmāyaṇam*. We may say that he prepared the ground, and even provided some of the inspiration, for the great epic. Considering the fact that Kulasēharar was a king, apart from the sweet refreshing qualities of his poetry, we can understand that he was a major influence in the development of Vaishṇavism in Tamilnad.

All his poems[2] show a passionate admiration for the beauty of the deity. In the one beginning 'iruḷ iriya', he

[1] This was the time when the Pallava and the Pāṇḍya power were weak; see *Pallavar Varalāṟu* by Rājamāṇikkaṉār, pp. 190-91; and *Pāṇḍiyar Varalāṟu* by Sadāsiva Paṇḍārattār, p. 30.

[2] *Perumāḷ Tirumoḻi*.

simply exults in the 'moon-face and lotus-eyes of the One Who is dark as the sea'[1] reposing on his couch in the traditional pose of Vishṇu. He longs to spend himself in the service of this glorious One. 'When will come the day', he cries, 'that my eyes melt in tears at this glorious sight?'[2]

Service to Vishṇu, according to him, as to Toṇḍar-aḍi-p-poḍi, is all that matters. The servants of Vishṇu are themselves like gods. 'If we could wear the dust of their feet', he says, 'what will become of the desire to bathe in the Ganges?'[3] 'Upon my brow I'll wear with pride', he continues, 'the mud that stains their holy feet.'[4] In the same poem he calls 'everyone mad but the madmen who with tearful eyes and thrilled body, pine for Him, and sing and dance and worship Vishṇu.'[5]

His approach to Vishṇu is through many channels. But, everywhere an intensely intimate note is heard. One of his poems[6] addressing Krishṇa, is through the lips of Dēvahi, Krishṇa's mother, from whom her son was taken away. All the passionate longing of the childless mother is perceived here. The great experiences of motherhood which she has missed, and the joys of Krishṇa's foster-mother Yasōdai, form the theme of this tense, moving poem, handled by a master-artist. The pen-pictures of the boy-Krishṇa are the traditional pictures, but they also throb with life. His mouth is greasy with the butter that he has stolen as he runs up to Yasōdai. His own mother mourns that she will never see her little son, covered with dust, run to her bosom.

Not less lovely are his two lyrics on Rāma. One is just a lullaby[7], but it is also a pure jet of song, which by

[1] *Perumāḷ Tirumoḻi*, I, 6. [2] Ibid, I, 7. [3] Ibid, II, 2.
[4] Ibid, II, 3. [5] Ibid, II, 9. [6] Ibid, VII.
[7] Ibid, VIII.

itself would preserve Kulasēhara's name from being forgotten. Another is the expression of Dasaratha's passionate grief when his beloved son Rāma was exiled to the woods. 'My gentle son', the father cries bitterly, 'well have I made you rule the land, I who heeded your mother Kaihēyi's words!'[1]

Addressing the prince's stepmother whose evil design exiled him, the monarch asks her:

'Keihēyi! In the two worlds,
You live yet happy. What have you gained
In driving to the woods my holy son,
His brother, and the tender bird, his wife,
Thus earning blame for your son too good for you,
And sending me to heaven?'[2]

Another poem is the entire *Rāmāyāṇa* in miniature.[3] But it is as a lyrist that Kulasēhara excels. Apart from the lyrics to Rāma and Krishṇa, he has left several beautiful pieces addressed simply to the Vishṇu deity who sleeps on the serpent 'on whose brow the jewels wink'.[4] One sees him pining like a girl for her lover. In another, he declares that he is thinking of Vishṇu as a child thinks of the love of its mother though she might have spurned it.[5] He is like a subject looking up to the sceptre of his king.[6] Like a lotus that refuses to open to any warmth other than that of the sun, even if a flame were brought close to it, his soul will not melt at any influence but Vishṇu's.[7]

But the loveliest of his poems is the one[8] beginning, 'ūṉēṟu selvattu'. He does not desire anything, he says,

[1] *Perumāḷ Tirumoḻi*, IX, 1. [2] Ibid, IX, 8.
[3] Ibid, X. [4] Ibid, I, 1.
[5] Ibid, V, 1. [6] Ibid, V, 3. [7] Ibid, V, 6. [8] Ibid, IV.

except to be within sight of his deity. He would give up his comforts and luxuries in his palace, to be born as a stork that dwells by the tank of the Vēṅgaḍam temple. He would give up his kingdom, to become a fish in that tank, or a flower by its garden, so that he might see always the jewelled feet of the image. 'To see your coral lips', he cries, 'I'd be a step of your temple, where the gods and the devotees and the dancers tread'. All the qualities of a great lyric are in this poem.

9. Periyāḻvār

Of the Vaishṇavite poets, Periyāḻvār takes decidedly the foremost place. From his own writings we know that he was a Brahmin and hailed from Villi-puttūr. He was also called Vishṇu-sittaṉ and Paṭṭar Pirāṉ. Tradition has it that he was spiritual counsellor to a Paṇḍya king named Srīvallabha. He himself does refer to Paṇḍiyaṉ Neḍumāṟaṉ[1] who is identified with Neḍuñcaḍaiyaṉ Parāndahaṉ, the Great Vaishṇavite (A.D. 765-790)[2]. Autobiographical details are scarce indeed in his verse. He does not even refer to his reputed daughter Āṇḍāḷ who ranks second only to him among the Vaishṇavite mystics. Periyāḻvār but rarely indulges in philosophical abstractions. He is far too much of a poet for that. And as a poet, he does not often go beyond our comprehension. More than half his poems[3]—there are 473 stanzas in all—have been devoted to the Krishṇa incarnation. Of these, most deal with the graces of Krishṇa as child and impish boy. Just a few deal with Krishṇa in the aspect of lover. Still fewer are the poems devoted

[1] *Periyāḻvār Tirumoḻi*, IV, ii, 7.
[2] Sadāsiva Paṇḍārattār, *Pāṇḍiyar Varalāru*, p. 29.
[3] *Tiṟū-p-pallāṇḍu* and *Periyāḻvār Tirumoḻi*.

to the Rāma incarnation. There are a number of pieces addressed directly to the Vishṇu deity as resident in the temples.

In Periyāḻvār's verse, we find not merely the roots of *piḷḷai-t-tamiḻ*, but also the flowers and fruit it has borne. Very beautiful are some of his flashlight photographs of childhood. They are tinged with poignancy when we realise that he has created them out of his childlessness, if tradition can be credited. Nor are they incompatible with it. All the longing for a child to call his own, all the paternal instinct inherent in his nature, seems to find expression in Periyāḻvār's pictures of childhood. The Krishṇa of his creation is a lovely child, with every detail complete, alert, vivacious and lusty. For the nonce, in his tenderness and admiration, Āḻvār becomes transformed into Yasōdai, the proud mother of this child.

'He kicks till the cradle snaps; if I should take
Him on my waist, my middle threatens to break;
If I to my bosom fold him, he plunges into my navel;
O dear! I have no strength to carry him, friend!'[1]

He rejoices in the smallest detail of the marvellous boy:

'Come see the flowerlike feet the silly babe
Takes to his mouth and munches'.[2]

Who but a mother could be so doting?

'Come watch the lips, the eye, the mouth, the smile,
The nose, of the little man whom Yasōdai
With powdered turmeric cleans the tongue and bathes'.[3]

[1] *Periyāḻvār Tirumoḻi*, I, i, 9.
[2] Ibid, I, ii, 1.
[3] Ibid, I, ii, 15.

He will even notice 'the dew from his lotus mouth, that falls and breaks and drips'.[1] Nothing in the child can disgust him, not even the toddler coming up to the mother from behind, and wetting her.[2] And in his recording of details such as these, there is a delicacy of handling which quite reconciles the reader also to them.

In treating Krishṇa as a child Periyāḻvār is at his best when he forgets the element of god-head, drops those allusions to *puraṇic* and local stories which turn up as anachronisms, and loses himself simply in the graces of the child-god. We may not grasp the philosophy which calls this verse worship of a god, but we can easily follow and appreciate this worship of the beauty of childhood. It is eternal in itself, and in Periyāḻvār's verse its deathless grace has been captured. Later *piḷḷai-t-tamiḻ* has, in elaborating and codifying the subject, strangled the life out of it.

Krishṇa, the impish boy, also is attractive in Periyāḻvār's hands:

> 'He'll tip over the jar of oil;
> He'll pinch and wake the babe,
> And roll his eye in mischief'.[3]

Says his mother to her naughty son, 'Aren't you ashamed? Nappiṉṉai will laugh at you!'[4] Nappiṉṉai, by the way, is the prospective bride.

Periyāḻvār's descriptive powers, however, are not confined to Krishṇa the child or boy. Krishṇa, the flutist, a favourite theme all over the country, is quite picturesque. So are the animals that listen to him, 'motionless as a

[1] *Periyāḻvār Tirumoḻi*, I, vii, 7.
[2] Ibid, I, ix, 1.
[3] Ibid, II, iv, 6.
[4] Ibid, 9.

picture'.[1] The youth Krishṇa, the object of the passion of countless young girls, has taken the fancy of a maiden. This is her reaction:

'She wears her necklace; looks in the glass;
Jingles her bangles; arrays herself in silk;
Forgets herself; reddens her ripe red lips'.[2]

The mother's diagnosis of her daughter's malady is the right one, but apparently it is the daughter who finds the remedy. Just after the daughter's elopement, the mother looks at the house, now appearing deserted, like

'A beautiful lotus-pool, which after the frost
Loses its beauty, the petals and pollen shed'.[3]

She laments the loss of her daughter:

'I had an only daughter; and goddess-like
I brought her up; the fair-eyed god has taken her!'[4]

This passage, has, though without authority, been connected with Āḻvār's own gift of his beloved Āṇḍāl, his foster-daughter, to Krishṇa.

There is no doubt that Periyāḻvār or the Great Āḻvār was a most ardent Vaishṇavite. His *Pallāṇḍu* or the poem with the chorus 'Live long', addressed to Vishṇu, has been interpreted as the result of a religious ecstasy, in which frenzied state he has quite reversed the position of deity and worshipper, the worshipper condescending to confer his blessings on the deity. But, indeed, it could very simply be interpreted as an All-Hail or blessing to the symbol of Vaishṇavism, desiring the godhead to live long in the form of Vishṇu in the hearts of the people. Considering the fact that Śaivism claimed the allegiance of the majority, there is hardly anything out of place in

[1] *Periyāḻvār Tirumoḻi*, III, vi, 9.
[2] Ibid, vii, 8. [3] Ibid, viii, 1. [4] Ibid, 4.

such an interpretation. Periyāḷvār is most warm in the praise of Vishṇu. 'Death', he says, 'will not touch those who

Make their breast His temple, set up the Vishṇu image,
And strew before Him the flowers of love'.[1]

'Call your children' he advises mothers, 'by Vishṇu's name Nārāyaṇa, and you will not go to hell'.[2] He can be rude in his esteem of non-Vaishṇavites, even of Śaivites. 'The water that washed Vishṇu's feet', he says, 'rested on Śiva's head, before it swelled into the Ganges'.[3] 'How did he create', he asks, 'who created the sinners who do not worship Vishṇu?'[4] 'Snatch the rice from the mouths of these who burden the earth, and stuff them with grass instead'.[5] 'And as for the servants of Vishṇu, why', he says, 'The world is blessed by the dust of their feet'.[6] Vishṇu, by the way, is by his account equally partial to his servants. Even if Lakshmi, his consort, should complain of their misdeeds, this would be the god's answer:

'My servants would not do it; or, if they did,
They have done well!'[7]

Occasionally, it must be said, he gives way to a sensuous vein in his religious poetry.

When he rises above sectarianism to the heights of his own religious experience, then Periyāḷvār's stature is lofty indeed. He tells the deity that wife, child and all the blessings of life he has had at his feet.[8] He seems to hold Vishṇu firmly by the feet when he cries:

'My Lord! I have found thee! Now,
Shall I let thee go?'[9]

[1] *Periyāḷvār Tirumoḷi*, IV, v, 3. [2] Ibid, vi.
[3] Ibid, vii, 3. [4] Ibid, iv, 1. [5] Ibid, 5. [6] Ibid, 6.
[7] Ibid, ix, 2. [8] Ibid, V, i, 5. [9] Ibid, V, iii, 1.

'I have filled my soul with thee', he says, 'as though I churned the sea to nectar and filled with it a bowl'.[1] 'Do not fear to make me thy slave', he tells the deity, 'I do not beg for clothes or food of thee; I only want the royal privilege of serving thee'.[2] He is not hungry, he says, not because he has eaten. He feels the pangs of hunger only when he has not meditated on the deity and chanted his name.[3] He bids the diseases that crowd as thick as ants round a ghee-pot, flee him, for it is the print of Vishṇu's feet that he wears on his forehead in the sacred paste.[4]

Like every born poet, Periyāḻvār knows to arrest the reader by his images:

'Sins flee to hide behind the bushes'.[5]
'The forest of death-dealing sins is afire'.[6]

The description of Srīraṅgam,

'Where the swan with his mate swings on the lotus flower,
And bathes in the golden dust of that flowery couch',[7]

is worthy of the temple itself. And the poet can quite take our breath away by a simile. The first tooth that the infant Krishna cuts is sweet

'As the tender sprout of moon appears
On the tip of the highest twig'.[8]

A distinctly lyrical note is also struck throughout. What with his smooth-gliding diction, his happy choice of *tāḻisai* metre and his deft use of refrain, his poems sing naturally like some of the old *Kali-t-tohai* pieces.

'koṇḍal vaṇṇā iṅgē pōdarāyē! kōyil piḷḷāy iṅgē pōdarāyē! teṇḍirai sūḻ tiruppēr-k-kiḍanda tirunāraṇā iṅgē pōdarāyē!'[9]

[1] *Periyāḻvār Tirumoḻi*, V, iv. 4. [2] Ibid, V, i, 4. [3] Ibid, V, i, 6. [4] Ibid, V, ii and 8. [5] Ibid, V, iv, 3. [6] Ibid, V, iv, 2. [7] Ibid, IV, ix, 9. [8] Ibid, I, vii, 2. [9] Ibid, II, ix, 4.

Not a few of his verses run in this strain. But, whatever the theme, or the mood, in Periyāḻvār, we can always hear the unmistakable voice of the poet.

10. Āṇḍāḷ

Āṇḍāḷ, daughter of Periyāḻvār, is the most fascinating of the Āḻvārs, though actually she was not even included in their number at first. The esteem in which Periyāḻvār, as we know from her own words[1], was held, may have been responsible for the inclusion of this remarkable woman among the Vaishṇavite sages. As a devotee, her ardour is not a whit less intense than that of the other Vaishṇavite bards. In sheer poetic quality, she is not below the very best of poets. The range of her experience is strictly limited, but the elusive charm and the penetrating sweetness of her tone, which she maintains throughout is what even the most fastidious of critics might well appreciate. Hers is a truly feminine genius, unlike Avvai's, and for that reason stands by itself in Tamil literature.

One fault, perhaps the only fault, of Āṇḍāḷ's, which has generally been overlooked by her admirers, is the imparting of a highly sensuous colouring to a religious theme. Her passion for her divine lover is the passion of a voluptuous woman for a man, hardly the delicate, ethereal longing of a maiden for the man she is to wed. It is not the unblushing confession of the feeling that is at fault, though that could be called indelicate for a woman. It is the feeling itself, the translation, at times, of the divine into grossly physical values. We hear often of the womanly delicacy of her handling a love-theme, in her asking the shell that Krishṇa blows upon, of the smell of his mouth:

[1] *Nāycciyār Tirumoḻi*, VII, 10.

'Smell they of myrrh? Or do they smell of lotus flowers?
His beautiful, holy lips of coral, are they sweet?
How taste and smell the lips of him who broke the tusk
For I dearly want to know—say, white shell from the sea!'[1]

But neither the sentiment nor the expression of it is always kept within even such limits.

The love-story of Āṇḍāḷ is a wonderful story. Periyāḻvār, of whom we have just heard, found her as a baby in his garden. He brought up this foundling as his daughter, nurtured, as we may well imagine, on the love of Krishṇa. Āṇḍāḷ later refused to marry mortal man, and imagined herself Krishṇa's bride, boldly wearing even the garlands intended for the image of Krishṇa. The story ends in her union with her divine lover. Much of supernaturalism, much of miracle, is woven into this story, but at least Āṇḍāḷ's devotion to Krishṇa cannot be doubted. Her poetry is ample evidence for it.

Āṇḍāḷ has left but two works, *Tiru-p-pāvai* of 30 stanzas and *Nāycciyār Tirumoḻi* of 143 stanzas. Krishṇa is the hero and she, the heroine in both, showing the way her mind works. The setting is either the Kōvarttaṉam where Krishṇa romped among the cowherdesses, or Yamuṉai or Madurāpuri, but always with Krishṇa. *Tiru-p-pāvai* owes its origin to a religious observance among maidens of the cowherds' class. Māṇikkavāsahar also has treated this subject. But, Āṇḍāḷ's is by far the most picturesque poem. In it, girls who have fasted all the night, go early in the morning to bathe in the river, and practise certain rites, which are to earn for them good husbands, and for their country abundant rain. Āṇḍāḷ assumes that she and

[1] *Nāycciyār Tirumoḻi*, VII, 1.

her friends go from door to door, knocking and rousing the still sleepy girls, and finally where do they make their way but to the house of Nandagōpaṉ, Krishṇa's foster-father, and who must open the door for them but Nappiṉṉai, Krishṇa's wife? And finally, what does Āṇḍāḷ require but that Krishṇa must help her friends in the rites, for he is not only the husband they require and the god they are ministering to with their rites, but their companion and playmate as well? She bids him: 'Send us not away without accepting our services, and deliver us from other desires'.[1]

The subject is very artistically treated indeed, from the prayer for rain, with its picture of the fertile land, where

'The striped beetle dozes on the hyacinth flower, . . .
And the huge generous cows from udders fill the pots,'[2]

to the description of the morning, suggestive in sheer sound-arrangement of the chirp and twitter of birds.

'Do you not hear the talk of the noisy birds,
And the churning of the curd by cowherds' wives
To the jingle of the bracelets?'[3]

There is a very lovely picture of a girl asleep, the very image of luxury:

'Open the sapphire-door, uncle's daughter,
Who dozes on the cushion in the jewelled hall,
In the midst of lights, with incense burning'.[4]

These are some of the rites the girls have to observe:

'We touch not butter, we drink not milk; our eyes
We paint not; we wear no flowers upon our hair;
We do not things we should not; we carry no tales;
But we give alms and charities'.[5]

[1] *Tiru-p-pāvai*, 29. [2] Ibid, 3. [3] Ibid, 7. [4] Ibid, 9. [5] Ibid, 2.

Āṇḍāḷ's description of rain is coloured by Krishṇa. She bids the cloud,

'Darken like Krishṇa's form,
Flash lightnings like his sword, sound deep like his conch,
And like his arrows shoot down drops of rain'.[1]

She entreats Krishṇa to arise and come,

'Like the lion, asleep in his den,
That wakes, opens his eyes of fire, shakes
Himself till the hair rises along his mane,
Lazily stretches his length, then with a roar
Moves out from his lair'.[2]

In the *Nāycciyār Tirumoḻi* Āṇḍāḷ's dream is by far the best. It has, and deservedly so, attained such popularity that it is sung at every Vaishṇavite wedding. In this most beautiful lyric, which defies every attempt at translation, she is narrating to her maiden the wonderful dream which she had, of her marriage with Krishṇa. Step by step, the elaborate rituals of a Brahmin wedding are narrated, but—this is too glaring an omission to be without significance—there is no mention of the sacred *tāli* or marriage signet.

But, there are many pieces of supreme beauty in *Nāycciyār Tirumoḻi*. There is that lovely piece beginning,

'Jessamine lady! With your sweet smiles
Torture me not!'[3]

There is that *piḷḷai-t-tamiḻ* piece in which she imagines herself as a little girl whose doll's house has been destroyed

[1] *Tiru-p-pāvai*, 4. [2] Ibid, 23. [3] *Nāycciyār Tirumoḻi*, X, 4.

by the mischievous Krishṇa.[1] There is that beautiful poem addressed to the conch.[2] But, indeed, everything left by Āṇḍāḷ shows a rare sense of word-values, a trembling sensitiveness to beauty and a deep and single-hearted passion.

It is hard to explain the quality of her music—it is so elusive and sweet. Verbal music is a quality in which she cannot be often surpassed. There is no need to choose an example from her poems. What she is, she is throughout. These few lines are taken at random:

'. . . tiṅgaḷ mummāri peydu
ōṅgu perum sennelūḍu kayal uhaḷa
pūṅguvaḷai-p-pōḍil poṟivaṇḍu kaṇpaḍuppa'.[3]

11. Tirumaṅgai Āḻvār

Tirumaṅgai Āḻvār, considering the bulk of his work, should take no mean place among the Āḻvārs. He is the most voluminous writer among them, having left six poems running to 1361 stanzas. He is quite conscious of his own distinction as a Tamil scholar like Sambandar among the Nāyaṉārs. From the details he gives of himself, we gather that he was the ruler of Maṅgai of Tiruvālināḍ[4] and a feudatory, most probably, of the Pallavas.[5] His references to Nandipura Viṇṇaharam[6] built by Nandivarmaṉ II, and Vairamēhaṉ[7] identified with Dandivarmaṉ suggest that he lived at the end of the eighth century and in the beginning of the ninth. He was widely travelled, covering in the course of his pilgrimages, the Pāṇḍya,

[1] *Nāycciyār Tirumoḻi*, II.
[2] Ibid, VII. [3] *Tiru-p-pāvai*, 3.
[4] *Periya Tirumoḻi*, III, iv, 10.
[5] Ibid, I, ix, 7. [6] Ibid, V, x. [7] Ibid, II, viii, 10.

Chōḷa and Pallava territories, and the banks of the Ganges and the foot of the Himālayas. His poems have a good deal to say about the shrines he visited and their natural setting, after the manner of Sambandar. Tradition gives us the colourful story that he was a robber chieftain who robbed to serve his god. For this, however, there is no authority. The story that he worsted Sambandar in a poetic contest is only an anachronism. However, he is for the Vaishṇavites, what Sambandar is to the Śaivites.

His work gives the impression of vast erudition. He is called Nālu-kavi-p-perumāḷ or 'master of four kinds of verse'. He has attempted a variety of metres like *tuṟai*, *tāḻisai* and *viruttam* which are all post-Sangam developments besides the old *ahaval* and the new type of *veṇbā* introduced by Cēramāṉ Perumāḷ. *Sandam* or regular rhythmic-pattern also is tried. He gives a new colour to the old Sangam love-theme.[1] The influence of *Dēvāram* is quite marked in his poems. All his works, therefore, show scholarship, and at the lowest are creditable literary exercises, and at the highest, narrowly miss the achievement of great poetry. The poems read easily and pleasurably, and there is a singsong music about many of the pieces. But the finish of the highest art, the spontaneity of inspiration, and the moving force of a deep experience are wanting.

Several of his poems are in praise of the deities of the temples he visited. Several others deal with his repentance for his past life. Murder, deceit and debauchery, he counts among his crimes.[2] In those warlike days, it is quite credible that, as a prince, he was responsible for bloodshed and lived a life of sensuality from which

[1] See his *Siṟiya Tirumaḍal* and *Periya Tirumaḍal*.
[2] *Periya Tirumoḻi*, I, ix, 2, 3 and 5.

he sought deliverance. But the majority of his poems deal with divine love. They are fitted into the pattern of conventional love, though the heroine (the soul) has thrown up the conventional restraint. Her yearning for the beauty of the deity is frankly physical.[1] The name of Nārāyaṇa is prescribed as a cure for the affliction of sin.[2] We may also observe that, like his predecessors, Tirumaṅgai Āḻvār is not above attacking the Jains and Buddhists,[3] and is not prepared to accept that Śaivism is on a level with Vaishṇavism[4].

But, more pronounced perhaps than the religious strain of the poems, is their literary flavour. Catchwords, probably taken from war-songs, like *kūḷamaṇi tūram*[5] and *poṅgattam poṅgō*[6] are employed as refrains. The beginnings of *piḷḷai-t-tamiḻ*, showing the godhead as a child, are occasionally found here,[7] though perhaps they are not so remarkable as in Periyāḻvār. Yasōdai is shown inviting the child Krishṇa as 'the little son who fled in fear of his mother's small cane, and wiped his mouth of curds'. Sensitiveness to the grace of childhood is quite a remarkable feature in Tamil literature and the childhood of Krishṇa is an endless source of enjoyment to the Vaishṇavite bards. It is as Krishṇa, more than Rāma or any other incarnation that Tirumaṅgai Āḻvār sees his god.

Tirumaṅgai Āḻvār is also called Aruḷ-māri, Kali-kaṉṟi, Para-kālaṉ, Araṭṭamukki and so on. His status must have played a large part in influencing the religious move-

[1] *Periya Tirumaḍal* and *Siṟiya Tirumaḍal*.
[2] *Periya Tirumoḻi*, I, i, 10.
[3] Ibid, II, i, 5 and 6.
[4] Ibid, I, v, 8.
[5] Ibid, X, iii.
[6] Ibid, x, ii.
[7] Ibid, iv, v, etc.

ment, though his poetic achievement is not inconsiderable. His gift is quite genuine, though unrefined; prolific, though not subtle or intense; pleasant, but not arresting. The poetic qualities of his verse remind us of Cowper's, if we make allowance for difference of approach to a religious subject.

12 Nammāḻvār

Nammāḻvār is considered by the Vaishṇavites to be the greatest of the Āḻvārs, for the spiritual wisdom contained in his poems and the other Āḻvārs are said to be merely his 'limbs'[1]. He is the one who gave them the scriptures. We are told that he has given the essence of the *Rig Vēda*, the *Yajur Vēda*, the *Atharvaṇa Vēda* and the *Sāma Vēda* in the *Tiru-viruttam*, *Tiru-āsiriyam*, *Tiru-andādi* and *Tiru-vāymoḻi* respectively.[2] He has quite a number of names of which the most well-known are Māṟaṉ and Saḍagōpaṉ. He comes of a chieftain's family of Vēḷāḷa blood. His father was one Tiru-k-kāriyār of Tiru-k-kuruhūr and his mother was from Tiruppadisāram. It is probable that he lived at the end of the ninth century, since he refers to the Vishṇu shrines at Sīvaramaṅgai and Varaguṇamaṅgai[3] that came into existence in the second half of the eighth century or first half of the ninth and since in the Tiru-k-kaṇṇapuram inscription of 908 A.D. his name Saḍagōpaṉ is mentioned for the first time.[4]

For all the emphasis laid on his greatness, the man of literary tastes does not find much to relish in his work. His diction is essentially unpoetic and artificial. Hardly

[1] *Guru-parambarā-prabhavam*, S. Krishṇamāchāriyār edit., (1927), p. 76.

[2] Varadarāja Ayyar, E. S., *A History of Tamil Literature*, p. 295.

[3] *History of Tamil Lang. and Lit.*, pp. 130-131.

[4] Varadarāja Ayyar, E. S., *A History of Tamil Literature*, p. 298.

any intensity of feeling shows itself here. The tone is mainly argumentative and philosophical. Few indeed are his purely poetic virtues.

Tiru-viruttam of 100 stanzas applies the moods of Sangam love-poetry to religion, showing the soul's longing for union with Vishṇu, breaking the fetters of the body. *Tiru-āsiriyam* of only seven stanzas simply dwells on the appearance and qualities of Vishṇu, the Absolute God, and pities all who serve other gods. His *Tiru-andādi* of 87 stanzas is not really better than the *andādis* by the other Āḻvārs. He says here that he, a devotee of Vishṇu, has risen by his devotion to a status greater than His own.[1] And there is one rather spicy stanza in which he bids his sins leave his heart, since he does not have enough room therein even for Vishṇu.[2] The bulk of *Tiru-vāymoḻi* of 1102 stanzas is interpreted as showing the joy of god-realisation. His expression, however, fails to penetrate. In general, he is one whose literary worth belies his reputation.

With Madura-kavi, we come to the last of the Āḻvārs, though his name had been originally omitted from the list. He has left only a dozen undistinguished stanzas. It was perhaps his close association with Nammāḻvār as the latter's disciple that brought him into the limelight.

The sacred lore of the age which gave the background to the *bhakti* movement has been mentioned in the hymns themselves. There are references in later works to a *Rāmāyaṇa*, *Mahābhārata*, etc., belonging to this age. Unfortunately, all that is left to us of them is a considerable slice of *Perundēvaṉār Pāradam*, if we do not take into consideration a few scraps of some *Rāmāyaṇas*.[3]

[1] *Periya Tiru-andādi*, st. 75. [2] Ibid, st. 30.

[3] *Puṟa-t-tiraṭṭu*, *Commentary to Vīra-sōḻiyam*, and *Srī-purāṇam*.

13. Perundēvaṉār Pāradam

Perundēvaṉār Pāradam is written mainly in the *veṇbā* metre. The invocatory stanzas, prefixed to the Sangam anthologies, are assigned to one 'Perundēvaṉār who wrote the *Pāradam*.' This *Pāradam* probably of the previous period is now lost. Perhaps, the few *Pāradam* stanzas preserved in later works[1] are taken from this. It is strange that, some centuries later, a poet of the same name should have arisen to treat the same subject. Unfortunately, his work too is not available in its entireness. From the middle of *Uttiyōha-paruvam* to the middle of *Turōṇa-paruvam*,—that is all that is left to us of it, and it is precious little. From the first two stanzas of the work we understand that the author was a Vaishṇavite and was patronised by 'the Pallava Victor of Teḷḷāṟu'. In South Indian History there are two Pallava kings who claim victory in the battle of Teḷḷāṟu, one belonging to the ninth century and the other, to the thirteenth. Of the two, the former can be taken to be the patron of Perundēvaṉār. For one thing, he it was that defeated 'kings' in the battle as mentioned by the poet. Secondly, he was not a desecrator of Vaishṇavite temples like the latter[2] and as such it is more reasonable to take him as the patron who encouraged a Vaishṇavite poet[3] to write a work like the *Pāradam*.

In the Sanskrit original, the Mahābhārata is held to be a great work, with stirring incidents and powerful characters, and we might have expected the Tamil adaptation to bear some faint reflection of the greatness of the

[1] Nac. *Commentary* to *Tol-kāppiyam*: *Puṟattiṇai-iyal*, 17 and 21; and *com. to Vīra-sōḻiyam*: *Poruṭpaḍalam*, 15, and *Alaṅgāra-p-paḍalam*, 12, 28 and 29.

[2] K.A.N., *The Cōḷas*, (1955), p. 423.

[3] *Nandi-k-kalambaham*, Shanmuga Sundaram edit., p. 63.

original. Unfortunately, the Tamil work fails to move. It has not the faintest claim to greatness, hardly anything beyond a flat competency. True, the *veṇbā* metre is not easy to manage for a stirring, flowing narrative, but Puhaḻēndi has put it to such splendid use in his sweet *Naḷa-veṇbā*, and we had better plead no excuse for Perundēvaṉār other than his want of genuine poetic intuition.

The prose interspersed in the work[1], however, deserves special mention. Unlike the prose in *Silappadihāram*, it is a specimen of real prose with an occasional rhythmic quality and it is interspersed between the stanzas almost throughout. It serves the purpose of a commentary to the stanzas and of linking them together. Sometimes, it can be really vigorous, though it does not always maintain a chaste style.

With the Nāyaṉārs and the Āḻvārs and Perundēvaṉār, we may dismiss the devotional literature that belongs to the *bhakti* movement proper. In extent and force it is great and, while it was sponsored by the *bhakti* movement, it was also responsible for the strengthening of the Vaiṣhṇavite and Śaivite causes in the Tamil land.

14. Perungadai

But the Buddhist and Jain religions were still felt in the literary field. The Jains especially seem to have taken a very active part in producing epics[2] moral stories[3] and didactic works. They are even the first lexicogra-

[1] *Tahaḍūr Yāttīrai*, not extant, is said to be a similar work of the period with prose passages interspersed, having for its theme an historical event.

[2] *Nārada Saridai*, *Paruppadam* and *Kalyāṇaṉ Kadai;* the Jains had even a *Rāmāyaṇa* in Tamil. The Buddhist work *Bimbisārakadai* probably belongs to this period.

[3] *Nari-viruttam*, *Eli-viruttam* and *Kiḷi-viruttam*.

phers in Tamil[1]. Let us now consider *Peruṅgadai*, one of the most ambitious epics they have left behind.

Peruṅgadai means the Great Story. It is certainly a long-drawn-out story, the story of Udayaṇaṉ, his father and his son. The beginning and the end of the story are not available, and we may be thankful for it. Udayaṇaṉ seems to be the hero, and his is the story of a man driven to a religious life through satiation with the good things of life. It is a Jain work, but we find in it anything but the note of asceticism. The work has been praised to the extent of being mentioned along with the *Kuṟaḷ* and the *Kambarāmāyaṇam*, but that is to set a molehill alongside of mountains, and we can but pity the judgment that could commit such a crime in the field of criticism. We do not deem it fit to give the *Peruṅgadai* more than a cursory attention. Spirituality is felt by its absence. If we look for any such thing as dramatic sense or characterisation, we must look here in vain. Sensuousness is the dominant note, and it is a sensuousness that tires one out and not one that repels. The poet of *Peruṅgadai* is not a poet of vision, certainly not one who can see beyond the sparkle of the tinsel of life. Of that tinsel, however, there is certainly a good deal in *Peruṅgadai*. In the story, in the characters, in the very real, unfailing softness of the consonantal arrangements and the easy flow of the metre, there is a decided, though superficial, attractiveness conducive to light reading. Perhaps, that is all that we need have said of *Peruṅgadai*, but comparisons can be provocative as well as odious.

We will give here a synopsis of the story. Udayaṇaṉ, king of Kausāmbi, contrives to elope with the princess Vāsavadattai whom he had tutored in the *yāḻ* while being

[1] *Sēndaṉ Tivāharam* written by Tivāharar.

her father's prisoner. Udayaṇaṉ's chief minister and friend Yūhi, seeing the bridegroom neglect his state-duties, makes up a story that Vāsavadattai is burnt to death and that Yūhi himself is dead. Vāsavadattai is persuaded to go into hiding. Udayaṇaṉ, grieving for his double loss, is not able to take up the reins of government, though Yūhi had meant to drive him to it.

Udayaṇaṉ's friends, on the pretext of teaching him a spell to bring back Vāsavadattai, guide him to the land of Magadam, where the princess Padumāpadi wins his love and is married to him. Yūhi returns now and restores Vāsavadattai to his friend. While the king is living with his two wives, he falls in love with one of their attendants, whom he spies at a game of tossing balls. Very pretty, natural and lively is the description of Māṉaṉīhai tossing the balls.[1] Despite his queens Udayaṇaṉ gets her love. Finally, hearing that she is a princess in disguise, he marries her. He also marries Virisihai, an ascetic's daughter, who, when a little girl, had received garlands from him. Each of these love-episodes is developed into a pretty adventure.

Then begins the story of Udayaṇaṉ's son Naravāṇaṉ who marries the beautiful Madaṉamañcihai. A Vidyādara prince carries her away but is unable to win her love. His sister Vēhavadi, however, manages to win the love of Naravāṇaṉ. Naravāṇaṉ gets back his first wife, and with her, Vēhavadi and eight thousand and one more wives, rules as an emperor.

The outline of the story suggests also its mode of treatment. Falling in love is the fashion, and love is by no means an all-pervading, transforming, purifying force. We have to accept that the work does have some sort of

[1] *Peruṅgadai*, IV, 12, 225-245.

prettiness, but to be pretty is not to be powerful. There is no proportionateness whatever between the length and the stature of the poem. If we are at all to enjoy Udayaṇaṉ's story, we should not go to it in expectation of greatness of any kind.

The author of *Peruṅgadai* is one Koṅgu-vēḷ from Vijayamaṅgai in Koṅgumaṇḍalam[1]. It is very likely that he took the story from the *Bṛihat-katha* written in Sanskrit by Durvinīta, king of the neighbouring Gaṅga country.[2] Durvinīta belongs to the first half of the seventh century.[3] From the quotation from the work[4] by the commentator of *Iṟaiyaṉār Kaḷaviyal*, we infer that *Peruṅgadai* comes earlier than the tenth century. These are the important clues to the period of *Peruṅgadai*.

15. Nāladiyār

From *Peruṅgadai*, we proceed to the next Jain work of importance, namely *Nāladiyār*. *Nāladiyār* is purely an ethical work which is now widely accepted among all sects of the Tamils. The word *Nāladiyār* means 'the great four-lined stanzas'. *Nāladiyār* can be taken as a collection of poems by a few Jain authors, though tradition would ascribe the authorship to four hundred Jain saints. We infer that the work received the patronage of the Muttaraiyars[5] of the seventh or the eighth century A.D.[6] One Padumaṉār has the honour of compiling this remarkable work which is ranked second only to the *Kuṟaḷ*

[1] Dr V. Swaminatha Ayyar, Preface to *Peruṅgadai*, (1953), p. xlvi.
[2] Ibid, p. lvi.
[3] Arokiaswami, M., *The Kongu Country*, p. 147.
[4] Compare *Iṟaiyaṉār Ahapporuḷ* (1939), p. 38 and *Peruṅgadai*, I, xxxii, 17 and 18.
[5] *Nāladiyār*, st. 200 and 296.
[6] *Sendamiḻ*, VI, pp. 6-18.

as an ethical poem in Tamil. Padumaṉār is also said to have left a commentary on it, but anyway the commentary is not extant.

Nāladiyār is composed of four hundred *veṇbās*, each *veṇbā* being a terse, four-lined stanza built round one central idea. It is divided into forty chapters of ten stanzas each. The whole is grouped under the headings *aṟam*, *poruḷ* and *kāmam*. The verse-sequence, however, is hardly natural, continuity of thought not being preserved always. More than one hand is positively discernible in it.

Unlike the *Kuṟaḷ*, where the beauty of home-life is exalted, *Nāladiyār* emphasises the virtues of asceticism. There is no mention of God. The prevailing tone of the work is cynical[1]. The Jain element is, thus, rather pronounced and as such one could not attribute to *Nāladiyār* the quality of universality. Besides, the note of idealism is weaker in *Nāladiyār*. It is for the man of the world, the man who wants to get on in life, even though emphasis is laid on austerity. Thus it is self-contradictory. Nor is *Nāladiyar* so terse as the *Kuṟaḷ*, the four lines allowing more room for expression. But the utterances are still wonderfully pithy, lending themselves, with their brilliant similes, to be absorbed into a people's stock of proverbs. No wonder that *Nāladiyār* finds its representation in every Tamil text book in modern schools, as it is on the lips of almost every literate Tamilian.

'Paddy has chaff, water its foam,
The flower its calyx; so,
The best of men will have his defects'.[2]

When you choose friends, it tells you, you should not choose those who have the qualities of an elephant.

[1] Pūraṇaliṅgam Piḷḷai, *Hist. of Tamil Lit.*, p. 70. [2] *Nāladiyar*, st. 221.

The elephant may know its mahout through and through, but he will one day call to mind some slight and wreak vengeance on him. It is far better to have friends like the dog, who, with the javelin stuck in his body, still wags his tail before the thrower.[1]

'Should the dog bite you, you could not bite back. It would debase you to insult those who insult you'.[2]

Nāladiyār has also a taste of humour. Lakshmi and Sarasvati, the goddesses of prosperity and learning, do not care to live with the same man for the time-honoured reason, jealousy.[3]

'You are not to advise fools, for, if you do, you will find your teeth knocked neatly into your hand, like the seeds of the *surai*'.[4]

Here and there stylistic devices like puns and onomatopoeia are employed. But quite independent of these, the style of *Nāladiyār* is telling enough, only the existence of the *Kural* has thrown this work into the shade.

There are a few ethical works of non-Jain authorship also in this period. *Iṉiyavai Nāṟpadu*, one among them, is an echo of *Iṉṉā Nāṟpadu* of the previous period. *Āsāra-k-kōvai*, however, is composed of exhortations, not purely on ethics, but on external observances too. For instance, it bids us bathe, rinse our mouth and wash our plantain leaves before dining, and face the east while at our meals[5]. The influence of the later Sanskrit *smritis* is worth observing in this work.[6]

16. New Literary Forms

We can see here the beginnings of several new forms of literary composition. One is the *kōvai* or 'string of

[1] *Nāladiyār*, st. 213. [2] Ibid, st. 70. [3] Ibid, st. 252.
[4] Ibid, st. 315. [5] *Āsāra-k-kōvai*, st. 18 and 20.
[6] *Hist. of Tamil Lang. and Lit.*, p. 94.

stanzas', each stanza being a short dramatic monologue by one of the characters in a love-story; a continuous story is to be traced from stanza to stanza. It is in the *kaṭṭaḷai-k-kalitturai* metre. Of the *kōvais*, *Pāṇḍi-k-kōvai* deserves to be remembered as the first[1]. It is by an unknown author, and is not even completely available to us. Of the 350 stanzas, collected from various sources, the major portion is taken from the commentary to *Iṟaiyaṉār Kaḷaviyal*. The work is of more historical than literary importance, being crammed with references to the victories of the Pāṇḍya kings of the seventh and eighth centuries. It was probably written in the eighth century.[2]

No great vitality is evident in the development of the literary scheme in *Pāṇḍi-k-kōvai*. In spite of its smooth-flowing diction, its composition is not a success, probably because of repetitions of Sangam sentiment and imagery. Trying to repeat that would be like whipping a horse already fatigued to death.

Kalambaham is another form of literary composition.[3] *Kalambaham* means a wreath of different flowers. Except for the fact that the different stanzas of the *kalambaham* are all composed in honour of the same person, they have hardly any inter-relation. Therefore there is room for plenty of variety in situation, mood and verse-form.

Nandi-k-kalambham is the first of the *kalambahams*.[4] It is written by an anonymous, but genuine poet, in honour of Nandivarmaṉ, the Victor of Teḷḷāṟu, a Pallava

[1] *Kāri-k-kōvai* and *Muttariyaṛ-kōvai* are two other *kōvais* of the period.

[2] Preface to *Pāṇḍi-k-kōva*, V. Duraisami edit. (1957).

[3] *ulā*, *mālai*, *maṟam* etc., are a few more literary forms of the period.

[4] *Tiru-k-kalambaham*, a Jain work, also may be assigned to the ninth century.

king of the first half of the ninth century. It consists of 116 stanzas[1] of which a few at least are certainly interpolations, since, according to the rules of *pāṭṭiyal* a *kalambaham* should contain only 90 stanzas. Some verses take Nandivarmaṉ as the hero, some as the king of the hero's country, and some show the heroine pining for Nandivarmaṉ's love. All the verses show a very feeling, sensitive style. Quite a number of them can be beautifully adapted to music, and several of them are quite lovely in themselves. They strongly remind one of the vignettes of love-life in Sangam literature, but still preserve a surprising freshness of treatment. We shall glance over a few of these interesting pieces:

The Pāṇaṉ or the minstrel, has a bad name in Tamil literature. He is the Pandarus who takes the hero to prostitutes' homes. Naturally, the heroine could not be expected to like him. See how a heroine treats him. In Nandi's court there was heard a noise of revelry and song at night. Next day the Pāṇaṉ visits the heroine's house. She greets him thus: 'Last night, hearing a loud noise at Nandi's court, my mother said it was a devil. My silly little sister said it was a dog howling. I said it was you!'[2] In this poem, Nandi is simply in the background as the patron of music.

We will just glance at another poem[3], one of the most beautiful pieces in *Nandi-k-kalambaham*. It is a brief lament over Nandi's death. 'Your face', cries the bard, 'is gone to the moon.' Your fame is gone to all the world. Your valour is gone to the tiger of the forest. Your long arms are in the boughs of the *kaṟpaha* tree. Your bride, the goddess of prosperity, is gone to Vishṇu. Your body

[1] *Nandi-k-kalambaham*, Shanmuga Sundaram edit. (1955).
[2] Ibid, st. 50.
[3] Ibid, st. 57.

is gone to the fire. 'But', he wails, the words getting lengthened out with their long vowels, 'I and my poetry, where shall we go for refuge, my father, Nandi, O jewel?'

One would be amply repaid for taking the trouble to go over the stanzas of *Nandi-k-kalambaham*. In the garb of Sangam convention the poet immortalises Nandi's many noble qualities, like his munificence and his valour. In sweetness of diction, emotional content, and imagination, the poems are decidedly arresting. We have said, *Nandi-k-kalambaham* is the first *kalambaham* in Tamil, but it is also the best. We do not see that alterations in a work of any kind would be desirable, though the editor[1] of *Nandi-k-kalambaham* has ventured to do it. The work should be made available to the readers precisely as it is in the original, its faults being left on the shoulders of the author. The editor says he has improved the original. But that is not to allow the right of tampering with the original works of great authors. And has not Kamban suffered at the hands of those who also set out to improve him?[2]

17. The Achievement of the Bhakti Poets

With the impact of religious ideas from the North, it is natural that Sanskrit and Prākrit words should have found their way into Tamil poetry. Even Sanskrit metres and literary embellishments were absorbed. Superstitions multiplied as the religions gathered strength and auguries found a place in literature. Musical compositions, though not unknown even in the Sangam period, gained paramount importance in the temples where dancing also was encouraged. To suit the changed

[1] Shanmuga Sundaram, L.

[2] See for instance *Kambar Tarum Rāmāyaṇam* by T. K. C.

conditions, grammatical treatises[1] came into being. Of these the treatises on poetry are most numerous.

We may now take leave of the Bhakti Period in Tamil literature, for we are at the threshold of a golden age of the Chōḷas, the Age of Kambaṉ. The Bhakti Period is by no means comparable to the Age of Kambaṉ, and hardly comparable to the previous age, the Age of Vaḷḷuvar and Iḷaṅgō, yet it has left an indelible mark on the history of the Tamils. There is far less of literary flavour, of the carefully cultivated graces of literary minds, than in the Sangam period, though the talents of the times have not completely weaned themselves from the Sangam influence. But the religious poetry of the age gets much closer to the hearts of the Tamil people than the poetry of any other age, without even the exception of Kambaṉ's verse. Though it is universally accepted that Vaḷḷuvar is the common heritage of all the Tamils, through his scholarly stiffness and conciseness he is almost unreadable to the masses and serves them best as the lofty ensign of their glory, whereas the songs of the *bhakti* movement are good for them to sing and weep over and get transported with delirious delight, with the ecstasy of the Āḻvārs and the Nāyaṉārs.

The spirit of the people, longing for a personal god to worship and love and admire, has fastened upon these beautiful hymns for emotional satisfaction. To the Vaishṇavite and Śaivite causes in Tamilnad, we may say, these songs are just short of being everything, and seem to be of greater importance than the temples. In bulk and force, in the spirit of ardent self-abnegation and adoration, in their relation to music and in genuine poetic experience, one wonders if the hymns inspired by

[1] *Mayēccurar Yāppu, Siṟu-kākkai-pāḍiṉīyam, etc.*

the Reformation in Europe could approximate to them. We are not concerned here with the deities worshipped. We are concerned here only with the nature and poetic achievement of the worshippers, and that is by no means small. True, even this *bhakti* poetry is tinted at times with human weaknesses, with intolerance and credulity, with garrulousness and childishness. But, at its best, it shows human nature passionately longing to be lifted out of itself by contact with a personal god. It does not indeed seem to be aware of the inevitable impact of this godliness on a man's character and social relations. That aspect of religion in Tamil literature seems to have been reserved for Kamban.

These *bhakti* poets reason little; they only want to believe in their personal gods. Of course, we admit that for them imagination takes the place of reality. And at their highest, they do not want to believe for any selfish, superstitious reasons, for achieving any worldly ambitions, but merely because they hold it as their creed that they can be lifted out of their baser nature, out of the trammels of birth as they call it, by their whole-hearted surrender to the cult of love for the godhead as they take it. Their sincerity is a standing witness to the fact that the cry for God is not created by artificial conditions, but is a thing rooted in the elementary strands of human nature, like hunger and thirst, like love and life.

V. THE AGE OF EPICS

(900 A.D.—1200 A.D.)

1. The Age of the Chōḷas

WE ARE stepping into the most flourishing period in Tamil history. As in the history of every empire, every people, there is one age that is outstanding in prosperity, and only one. From the close of the ninth century to the thirteenth century was the heyday of the Tamil empire. The Chōḷas had spread their conquests all over South India. They had gone even upto the Gangetic plains, Burma and Ceylon. What the kings pillaged, they brought to glorify their palaces and their country. Vaḷḷuvar's ideals, perhaps, ornamented the sage writings of their scholars, while their warriors ravaged their neighbours by force of the sword. They were probably not unaware of the cruelties they sponsored, and maybe, they fostered the growth of temples all over their territory, richly, munificently endowing them with the wealth they had brought from elsewhere,[1] to buy off their sins. As usual with every brilliant empire, every brilliant age in the world's history, the picture is one of terrorisation and conquests abroad, but within the country, of splendour, pomp, luxury and materialism, with a nest of poets chirping gaily, because the well-fed folks chose to hear them and the kings rewarded them. But, to the glory of human nature, from the midst of this bewildering confusion, one, or, at the most, two distinct spirits are heard to speak with the Voice of Eternity. The fame of the Chōḷas is extinguished and gone into the material

[1] Sāstri, K.A.N., *The Cōḷas*, (1955), p. 653.

dust where it rightly belongs; but the glory of their poets is still left over from it, and that no longer belongs exclusively to the Tamils. The splendour of the Tamil kingdoms is of account to us today mainly as the background for our poet of poets, where he observed the great truths of life behind the ephemeral grandeur of an empire. There he must have recognized and loved some of the people whom he brings to such wonderful life in his work. There, in the midst of his actual observation, he must have also had his dreams of the impossibly beautiful and grand in human nature, to which, with his art, he has been able to give the colouring of the possible.

The background of the times is also the background of the temples. The *bhakti* movement had given a halo to the already existing temples built by the Pallavas. Buddhism and Jainism had weakened, and Hinduism, in particular, Śaivism, had captivated the popular imagination and found favour with the kings. So sprang the rich crop of temples that are still standing, and the older temples left by the Pallavas seem to have given the sculptural inspiration. The most enthusiastic work of the best artisans of the time went into them, so much so a pillar is not a prop merely but a whole book of sculpture. Much of it is admirable, quite apart from the pains spent on it, which are an evidence of the religious temper of the day. The importance of the temples also involves the importance of the priesthood. The priests were men with generations of culture and education behind them, and the Tamil kings were always generous patrons of talent. Since the Brahmin priests were nurtured on Aryan traditions which they jealously preserved through the ages, Sanskrit *purāṇic* lore, which had been gradually spreading from early days, now became the common man's property and fired the popular

imagination. Cultural activities like singing and dancing now centered on the temples, and we sense here the strengthening of the hold the priesthood had on the people. Still, side by side with the temples with the Brahmin priests, we find the growth of the *mutts* managed on more indigenous lines. It is said that there was an uprising against the *mutts* in this period[1], and it seems reasonable to suppose that here were the beginnings of the two conflicting tides, Aryan and Dravidian, the backwashes of which have not died out even today in Tamilnad. Yet to these temples and *mutts* we owe a most tremendous debt of gratitude, for having preserved in their religious fervour a people's literary and cultural heritage that might otherwise have perished in the dark days ahead.

The literary background of the times is naturally quite different from those of the previous periods. Tamil literature had so far preserved its independence, though gladly absorbing what it could from the Sanskrit to enrich its heritage. In prosody, manner and matter, Tamil had no negligible achievements of its own. A language that can boast of the *Kuṟaḷ*, *Silappadihāram* and Sangam poetry has a proud record of its own. There had been an influx of Sanskrit metres and words in the *bhakti* period as was natural with the temples and the Brahmins gaining importance, but it was the metres in particular that enhanced the people's wealth of beautiful musical poetry. But with life fully centering on the temples, over-emphasis tended to be laid on the use of Sanskrit, and the Tamil vocabulary was being deluged with Sanskrit words. The Jains and the Buddhists also had no negligible part to play in this. The outcome of it all was the *maṇi-p-piravāḷam*, a hybrid language of

[1] Paṇḍārattār, *Cōḷar Varalāṟu*, II, p. 171.

Sanskrit and Tamil, which was coming more and more into vogue. The absence of any truly great work in *maṇi-pravāḷa* and the existence of substantial work in the indigenous language must account for the death of the former in later days. Yet, even in this age, the greatest of our bards has put Sanskrit only to its best use, refusing to be engulfed in it, at the same time freely and thankfully tapping its rich resources for his own creative art. Sanskrit literature could hardly have done a greater service to Tamil than give Kamban the motif for his work, and the Tamils have nothing greater than their Kavi-c-cakkaravartti. So from the impact of Sanskrit on Tamil we find the birth of numerous epics, of which four at least were famous in their day, and one is deathless. And this period may be rightly called the Age of Epics.[1] But we also find quite a few spurts of purely aesthetic, devotional and ethical poetry. Then there are quite a number of secular poems—some of which are new in form and outlook—in praise of kings. Poetry developed a form even for inscriptions. And the recognition and study of their literary heritage by the erudite, in particular, the Jain scholars, led to grammatical works, lexicons and commentaries.

2. Religious Literature

We will just consider the religious literature directly fostered by the temples in this period. Chief of the temple-requirements is public zeal, and the temple authorities could not allow the precious hymns of the previous age to die out. So they, with the support of the public and the patronage of kings, did their best to compile and codify that literature, and in this period those

[1] See Vaiyāpuri Piḷḷai's, *Kāviya-kālam*, p. 35.

Śaivite hymns took shape as *Dēvāram* and the Vaishṇavite hymns as *Divya-prabhandam*. Such a great mass-awakening to religion as that signified by them could not, however, end with their compilation, and in the age of the Chōḷas we find a few stray poets of that religious lineage.

Tiru-isaippā is the legitimate descendant of *Dēvāram*. It is, like the latter, a compilation of poems written in praise of Śiva by Śaivite devotees. But then, not all the poems of *Tiru-isaippā* are hymns in the fullest sense of the word. The nine poets represented in the collection look very small and humble by the side of the giants of the *Dēvāram*. In all they have left 290 stanzas—quite a modest collection. The modesty of their number, however, would have been immaterial, had it not been for the modesty of their quality as well. Despite this fact, the different poets are strongly individualised in their work. For example, Tiru-māḷihai-t-tēvar is an adept at scolding the non-Śaivites. The complete vocabulary of hatred, contempt and intolerance could be found in the few stanzas he has left, and sometimes the vocabulary gets too strong to be digestible. The noblest of the notes in *Tiru-isaippā* is sounded in the stanzas of Karuvūr-t-tēvar and Sēndaṉār, which remind us of the greater *bhaktas* of *Dēvāram*. In lines like these, for instance, 'To your golden feet I am sworn slave; shall I let you go, now that I have worn them?'[1], the genuine cry of the heart is heard. This Sēndaṉār has also left a *Tiru-p-pallāṇḍu*[1] on the lines of Periyāḻvār.

On the whole *Tiru-isaippā* is a feeble echo of its mighty predecessor. It shows the decadence of the *bhakti* movement, and is almost a strained literary effort to

[1] Sēndaṉār, *Tiru-isaippā*, I, st. 4.

represent a subject which was perhaps still dear to the hearts of the public.

The next personality for our consideration is Paṭṭiṉattār. It is evident that there have been two poets of the name, the first an erudite Śaivite sage and the second a *siddha* sage of a later day. We are here concerned with the former Paṭṭiṉattār who most probably belongs to the tenth century A.D. He refers to Māṇikka-vāsahar[1] of the ninth century. In the *Padiṉōrām Tirumuṟai* his poems are placed prior to those of Nambi-āṇḍār-nambi of about the close of the tenth century.

Paṭṭiṉattār was born in Kāviri-p-pūm-paṭṭiṉam and was of the merchant class. Tradition has it that he renounced his prosperity through divine interference. Echoes of a life of self-renouncement are evident in his works. In the form of his verse and in its moods, he very much resembles the other poets of *Padiṉōrām Tirumuṟai* like Nakkīra-dēva-nāyaṉār and Kabila-dēva-nāyaṉār. At times he employs *sandam* or rhythmic pattern in a way which reminds us of Sambandar and shows that we are on the road to Aruṇahiri. Though he talks much of religious experience, however, the ardour of an intimately personal experience is absent from his work. Yet he enjoys a vaster reputation than many of his compeers in the *Padiṉōrām Tirumuṟai*.

Paṭṭiṉattār's works are philosophical rather than poetical. In other words, he thinks out religious ideas and fits them into the poetical framework. One of the best of his verses is from *Kōyil-nāṉmaṇi-mālai*[2]. But even here the note is one of classical restraint, not mystical ecstasy, of sober and involved reflections, not of transcending earth's experience into an emotional and aesthetic experi-

[1] *Tiruviḍai-marudūr Mummaṇi-k-kōvai*, st. 28. [2] St. 28.

ence of what he sees as God. In this respect he is very different from the Nāyaṉārs of the *bhakti* period who preceded him. Work like his is good and pretty enough for reading at leisure, but hardly absorbing and exhilarating. His work is not negligible in quantity, consisting of five poems[1] running to 192 stanzas. Yet volume of output, or even a poet's reputation, is not always in proportion to a poet's greatness.

Nambi-āṇḍār-nambi is the last in the list of poets included in the *Padiṉōrām Tirumuṟai*, and he is the most largely represented in that work, having eleven poems to his credit[2]. He was a Brahmin and his native place was Nāraiyūr near Chidambaram. The chief merit of his poems is the most valuable information he has given about the Śaivite devotees, especially Sambandar. His *Tiru-t-toṇḍar Tiru-andādi* is a halfway house between Sundarar's *Tiru-t-toṇḍa-t-tohai* and the beautiful and the more ambitious *Periya-purāṇam*. His poems reveal a wide scholarship, and he has tried metres and *sandams* both old and new, though his poetry is not particularly remarkable. Much of his poetry is devoted to the praise of Sambandar. Nambi-āṇḍar-nambi might not be remembered by posterity for his poetry, but he is certainly remembered with gratitude for his having compiled the *Dēvāram* hymns and classified them. This is his substantial contribution. It is said that he classified the twelve Śaivite *Tirumuṟais*[3], but only the compilation of the first seven can be attributed to him[4]. Nādamuṉi has done a

[1] (*i*) *Kōyil Nāṉmaṇi-mālai*, (*ii*) *Tiru-k-kaḻumala Mummaṇi-k-kōvai*, (*iii*) *Tiruviḍai-marudūr Mummaṇi-k-kōvai* (*iv*) *Tiru-ēhambamuḍaiyār Tiru-andādi*, and (*v*) *Tiru-oṟṟiyūr Oru-pā-orupadu*.

[2] *Viṉayahar Tiru-iraṭṭai-maṇimālai, Kōyil Tiruppaṇṇiyar-viruttam, Āḷuḍaiya Piḷḷaiyār Tiru-ulā-mālai etc.*

[3] See *Tirumuṟai-kaṇḍa-purāṇam*.

[4] Rājamāṇikkaṉār, *Periya-purāṇa-ārāycci*, p. 78.

similar service to Vaishṇavism in compiling the hymns of the Āḻvārs a little later. We infer that Nambi's date was somewhere around the end of the tenth century[1], for the adjuncts he gives a contemporary Chōḷa king seem very well to fit Āditya of that time.

Kallāḍar is different from Kallāḍa-dēva-nāyaṉār of the *Padiṉōrām Tirumuṟai*. His work *Kallāḍam* is coloured deeply by the Sangam influence, and reads like Sangam poetry applied to religious purposes. The Sangam conventions had been worn thin by the early poets, and yet so strong had been their hold on the men of letters that even the religious-minded had been unable, or unwilling, to get themselves weaned completely from their influence. The dignified style of *Kallāḍam*, a Śaivite work, shows deliberate archaisms, and is crammed with allusions, and philosophy, and the abundance of references to the later religious stories connected with Māṇikka-vāsahar's life,[2] sets the time of *Kallāḍam* as later than the ninth century. According to tradition Māṇikka-vāsahar's *Tiru-k-kōvaiyār* was the model on which *Kallāḍam* was based[3]. *Kallāḍam* seems to have been a famous work in its day, for the public mind was as yet interested in Sangam literature, and the religious colouring must have made it doubly welcome to an age not free from the influence of the Āḻvārs and the Nāyaṉārs.

Plenty of talent is spent on the composition. Some of the images are quite brilliant. The buds of jasmine unfolding in the darkness and 'breathing perfume' are like Dame Night laughing at those who have fallen a prey to Love's arrows[4]. The lake is deep, broad and dark

[1] Sōmasundara Dēsihar, *Śaiva-sihāṃaṇihaḷ Iruvar*, p. 49.
[2] St. 49.
[3] Preface to *Kallāḍam*, Murray and Co., edit. p. 1. [4] St. 39.

'like the heart of women.'[1] One poem, meant to show the thinness of the forlorn heroine, wanders off to deal with precious stones, whose different kinds, different flaws and virtues[2] are dealt with in a way which should be very interesting information to a jeweller, but could hardly concern the devotee much! That really is the poet's major fault. He is not sure what he shall stress, whether the religious element or the Sangam element. And so we are compelled to observe the absence of a drive, an inspiring force, in his handling of both these elements.

Vēmbaiyar-kōṉ is another Śaiva poet of the merchant class who composed *Sirāmalai-andādi* on the model of *Poṉvaṇṇa-t-tandādi*.

Of the Vaishṇavite poets of the period, barring Kambaṉ, we know only of Tiru-araṅgattu-amudaṉār. He was the disciple of a disciple of Rāmānuja's, and has left a poem of a hundred stanzas on Rāmānuja. It is called *Irāmānusa-nūṟṟandādi*. It has been given a high place in Vaishṇavite literature. The Vaishṇavites call it their *Prapanna-gāyatri*.

We notice that the tendency among the Tamils to indulge in religious philosophy, or in other words, to think about God and evolve their own theories about Him gets stronger in this period. Rāmānuja, founder of the Visishṭādvaita philosophy, was himself a Tamilian Brahmin. Though he wrote in Sanskrit, his philosophy itself was strongly influenced by the *Divya-prabhandam* of the Tamil Āḻvārs. It is well-known that his writings greatly influenced religious thought all over India. Thinking about God, one must accept, had not been much in the Tamilian way of life. The Tamils had been

[1] St. 71. [2] St. 47.

mainly absorbed with the interesting details of actual life. Even Tiru-vaḷḷuvar had safely evaded religious discussion, though, in the main, accepting God as a real Presence somewhere in the background. Sanskrit and the Sanskritists had brought in this new element of religious thought, but it was, perhaps, characteristic of the strongly emotional and poetic nature of the Tamils that their first reaction to it was *bhakti* or love, ardent faith and ecstatic lyricism. It cannot be ignored that, in the wave of *bhakti* that was soon to spread all over India, the Tamil poets were by far in the lead, in point of time, and, to the best of our knowledge, their achievement is among the best. You do not get indeed in Tamil the grand outbursts of philosophical thought that you have in the *Upanishads*, majestic, restrained and awe-inspiring, but we hear an entirely different note, passionate, intimate and endearing, in the religious literature of the Tamils. Their attempts to discuss theological matters are not very impressive in the main. The Śaiva Siddhanta school of philosophy is claimed by the Tamils as their own[1]. In origin it could not have been their own, though indigenous thought could have guided its development. One of its exponents in Tamil comes about this period, namely Vāhīsa-muṉivar, whose work *Ñāṉāmirdam* is considered to be of some importance. But Vāhīsa-muṉivar was a Brahmin, and could not, in this period, have helped drawing from Sanskrit sources. It might be pointed out here that Vāhīsa-muṉivar was the first man to give room to the absurd story that Avvai, Kabilar and Tiru-vaḷḷuvar were the children of a Brahmin father and a Pulaya mother, who, poor woman, was obliged to discard her children at birth if she was to be with her lord!

[1] Subramaṇia Piḷḷai, K., *Sandāṉāsāriyar Sarittiram*, pp. 45-73.

3. Avvai

Now we come to Avvai. We have already met with one Avvai in the Sangam period, quite a conspicuous personality. The second Avvai is not less important. She has left, apart from two works[1]—religious and philosophical—which are not of much account, at least four ethical works[2], though tradition gives her the credit for fifteen works[3] altogether. As a matter of fact, she is one of the few poets that the unlettered among the Tamil population have learnt to love and appreciate. She is accepted by them as their Sybil of wisdom, and her profound sayings are current coin to this day in Tamilnad. If poetry is a criticism of life, all her sayings should be considered poetry. School children repeat with zest her reflections on life meant for the young, and they know her name also. She tells the children simple things like, 'Mother and father are the first known gods'[4], and 'The words of the elders are divine'[5]. The grandmothers who have never been to school also know her name, and they have their own store of her sayings. The thought-content of her poems is often prosaic and plain, but it gains in the telling, the chief beauty of which is its perfect simplicity and intelligibility. Take, for instance, 'kuṟṟam pārkkil suṟṟam illai'[6],—which means, 'If you consider faults, there can be no friends'. This is an advantage of Avvai's over Vaḷḷuvar, but then she rarely goes into the most complicated realms of thought. When she does make the venture, however, she has the unusual gift of

[1] (*i*) *Viṉāyahar Ahaval*, and (*ii*) *Ñaṉakkuṟaḷ*.
[2] (*i*) *Āttisūḍi*, (*ii*) *Koṉṟai-vēndaṉ*, (*iii*) *Mūdurai*, and (*iv*) *Nalvaḻi*.
[3] *Pandaṉ-andādi*, *Asadi-k-kōvai*, *Vaittiya Nihaṇḍu etc.*
[4] *Koṉṟai-vēndaṉ*, 1.
[5] Ibid, 75. [6] Ibid, 18.

making even abstruse things remarkably simple. See how she explains the fourfold values of life:

'Giving is Virtue; earning without foul means is Wealth;
Two loving folks, united in mind,
Living together in mutual help, is Love;
Giving up these three for love of God, is Heaven'[1].

She is usually content to abide by the most simple codes of conduct which she, as a venerable teacher, would prescribe for the ignorant masses who are her beloved children. And generously indeed the ignorant masses have repaid her, for she has been accepted by them while the grander men of letters stay shut out. Her poetry has percolated down to the lowest strata of Tamilian society. Quotations from her poetry can be found abundantly in all spheres of life. She has flashes of genuine poetic brilliance like the grander men of letters. She has her philosophy of life also, like the scholars and the mystics. But her poetry and her philosophy are closely, intimately bound up with the commonest experiences of the people. With due respect to the famous poets and the profound philosophers, we take here the liberty of remarking that there is no poetry, and, quite as certainly, no philosophy, that can be greater than life. We translate here three stanzas from Avvai's *Nalvaḻi*, showing her poetry at its best, and her philosophy at its truest:

'Asked to give up one day's food, you will not do it.
Asked to gather for two days, you will not accept it.
You never know my worries. Belly of mine, full of trouble!
It is difficult to get on with you'[2].

[1] *Tamiḻ Nāvalar Saridai*, Kaḻaham edit. 34. [2] St. 11.

'What we eat is one measure; what we wear is four feet long;
The thoughts that we think are eighty million; the blind life
Of the people, is but like an earthenware pot;
Till death it is sorrow'[1].

'When the fruit is ripe on the tree, no one is there
To press an invitation on the bats to come;
If like the cow there are those who will yield their wealth,
All the world shall become their friends'[2].

So Avvai's voice is, more than any other poet's, the voice of the people, giving expression to the pain of their hunger and the bruises of their hearts. She speaks from among them and to them. Kamban refines on the emotions, and Vaḷḷuvar on the ethics, of life. But they have probably more distant admirers than close friends to love them. As for pure philosophy, religious or otherwise, that is for a very small and possibly arrogant handful. But Avvai? Perhaps, no day passes without a Tamilian's hearing or repeating, quite unawares, some profound and poignant reflection or other, of the People's Poetess, on life. She is one of the poets that can never go out-of-date. In our impression of her as a poet for the unlettered, we are in danger of forgetting that she was herself by no means unlettered, and that she has managed even the *veṇbā*, one of the most difficult of Tamil metres, with a skill that is second only to Puhaḻēndi's. Some of her isolated stanzas are very beautiful, with the result that quite a number of stray stanzas that have been floating about masterless have been palmed off on her. There even seem to be interpolations in work accepted to be hers.

[1] St. 28. [2] St. 29.

It is a pity that so little should be known for certain about this remarkable woman. The people who love her should have been able to preserve the history of her life at least. Alas! The people are the most untrustworthy keepers of a poet's history, and as usual they have lent it out at compound interest. She seems to have been a staunch Śaivite from her poems, and in a spicy invocation to Vināyaka[1], she asks for the gift of the Triple Sangam Tamil, in return for the four gifts she is going to offer him. Her life must have been very eventful, for, she has been up and down the country and under the patronage of quite a number of personalities of different places and belonging to different communities. Her reference to *Tiru-vāsaham*[2] places her after the ninth century. A quotation from her *Koṉṟai-vēndaṉ* in the commentary on *Yāpparuṅgalam*[3] sets her before the second half of the twelfth century at the latest.

She might have been a member of the wandering minstrel class, like the first Avvai, and there is a short poem[4] of hers bitterly satirising the patrons who value a poet by his influence and show of wealth. Like the first Avvai again, she is quite conscious of her own merits, for she tells a patron that his clothes will tear but not so her poetry[5]. Her main difference from the first Avvai is that she is a much greater force, much nearer to the life of a vast people and to the workaday world. With Āṇḍāḷ, the two Avvais make up a very remarkable trio of poetesses in the Tamil world, to say nothing of the considerable number of minor poetesses who are beyond the scope of

[1] *Nalvaḻi.*
[2] *Nalvaḻi*, 40.
[3] Rule 63.
[4] *Tamiḻ Nāvalar Saridai*, Kaḻaham edit. 59.
[5] Ibid, 57.

this book. But the Avvais show a marked contrast to Āṇḍāḷ, having nothing of her mysticism, dreaminess, or hyper-refinement of feminine sensibilities. In the place of these qualities we find a strong, sober, robust nature reacting electrically to the actual factors of life. And so, after all, we could hardly blame the public for merging the two Avvais into one Avvai, 'the singer for gruel', whose life was several centuries long and who has passed into a dearly cherished myth.

4. The Epic Trend

The religious and ethical works of the period are, however, not its most predominent features. They could almost be called the dregs of the creative forces of the previous periods, even though, Avvai, poor solitary bird, has certainly got an original force in her, were it but the force of preaching. The distinctive glory of the Chōḷa age, a glory which it does not share with any other age, is the glory of its epics. Into these epics the religious and ethical strains of the period resolve themselves, of course, along with the distinctive artistic bents of the authors. And what a number of epics! A whole flood of them. The country literally teems with them. They are the outcome of a most vigorous literary life among the people, the outcome of study and discussion as much as inspiration. Jain epics, Buddhist epics, Vaishṇavite and Śaivite epics and historical epics—all come out into the open field of competition. In number at least the Jain and Buddhist epics are outstanding. The native poetic genius has fastened itself like a leech on the sources of Sanskrit literary greatness, drinking and drinking till it is gorged. Sanskrit has by now, mainly through religious influence, fully established itself in Tamil literary

circles. 'Dēva pāḍai', 'the language of the gods', Kambaṉ calls it[1]. Such being the status of Sanskrit and Sanskritists in the country, the best in Sanskrit religious literature could not fail to come into Tamil. For temple purposes the Sanskrit *purāṇas* must have come in very handy. And on the whole the Sanskrit epics constitute an imposing body of literature. At the same time the Tamils, with their own heritage behind them, have always been a language-conscious people. Their alert minds and generous natures have always been out to take, and acknowledge with gratitude, the best from anywhere, but then they must have it in Tamil. The result is the birth of the Tamil epics, written in open emulation of Sanskrit. Quite a number of the epics of this period are lost. It is reasonable to infer that many of these forgotten epics had not been accounted worthy of preservation by the public. But it is a pity that the Buddhist epics are lost completely, and perhaps there were reasons other than the want of merit for such total annihilation, since the religion itself was fast losing ground.

Since the impact of Sanskrit on Tamil was responsible for the Tamil epics of this period, it is right that we consider the requisites of an epic in Sanskrit. The Sanskrit *Kāvyādarśa* of the seventh century gives an outline of what an epic should be like. Of course an epic is a long narrative poem. There is an introduction containing an invocation. The four values of life—*aṟam*, *poruḷ*, *iṉbam* and *vīḍu*—are dealt with. There should be a peerless hero. Descriptions of mountains, seas, seasons etc., should abound. Events such as coronations, weddings and births are included. King's councils, embassies, invasions, victories etc., also find place. The work is

[1] *Kamba-rāmāyaṇam*, *Pālakāṇḍam*, Murray and Co., edit. *Pāyiram*, st. 10.

divided into chapters and further subdivided into cantos. The nine accepted poetic moods are exploited. The plot-development is broadly divided into five. Besides all this, there are elaborate instructions on epic style or *rīti*, its use of ornaments like figures of speech and so on.

A glance at the above plan will show the vast difference of *Silappadihāram* and *Maṇimēhalai* from it. They have no heroes but only heroines. They are not concerned with coronations or embassies. The nature description is on conventional Sangam lines. Only the names of the sub-divisions[1] seem to be from the Sanskrit. Perhaps, the long poems suggested by Tol-kāppiyar[2], our venerable grammarian, in the dawn of recorded Tamil literature, were epics of this type. What has happened to them, we might ask. But we can only ask that question of the relentless floods of Time, and they would give us the answer to our dearly-cherished illusions of literary immortality!

As it is, however, the Tamilians recognize *Silappadihāram* as an epic as much as *Sīvaha-sindāmaṇi* or *Kamba-rāmāyaṇam*. Its classical graces of restraint, quiet dignity and unfailing faithfulness of observation are completely alien to the spirit of the Sanskrit-inspired epics, without even the exception of *Kamba-rāmāyaṇam*. Since even *Silappadihāram* is accepted by the Tamils as an epic, one could not expect them to observe the minor differences between the Sanskrit *purāṇas*, *kāvyas* and *ithihāsas*. So they now dispense with hard-and-fast rules here altogether, and speak of their longer, ambitious narrative poems under the name *kāppiyam*, a derivative from the Sanskrit word *kāvya* for epic, only preserving some sort of distinction for the *purāṇas* as being purely

[1] *kāṇḍam* and *kādai*.

[2] *Tol-kāppiyam*, *Seyyuḷ-iyal*, 229-234.

mythological stories. But, here again, *Periya-purāṇam* is an exception.

5. Sīvaha-sindāmaṇi

The first, in order of time, among the available epics is *Sīvaha-sindāmaṇi*. It is a Jain work. Though Jainism and Buddhism were declining religions, they still continued as a literary force, for, by reason of their learning, their poets still enjoyed the patronage of kings. The Jain Sangams were not yet extinct[1]. They also largely drew from the Sanskrit, but their works failed to make any deep impression on the lives of the people. *Sīvaha-sindāmaṇi* is, however, a most popular Jain work of the period, at least among the scholarly and the elite. It is an ambitious work. The religious note is very much pronounced in it. The tone of the work, however, does not justify this religious note, there being far more of sensuousness in *Sīvaha-sindāmaṇi* than in *Peruṅgadai*. The sensuousness here is of a kind that satiates and almost repels. One could hardly call it an invitation to an austere life on account of the vanity of the good things of the world. It is quite evident that the author is not himself of an austere turn of mind, and tries in vain to reconcile his nature with the precepts of Jainism. There is a story which is not incredible, that a Chōḷa king found too much pleasure in reading through the story, whereupon the poet Sēkkiḻār admonished him against wasting his energy over such useless Jain material, and, for the king's spiritual benefit, produced *Periya-purāṇam* or the story of the Śaivite devotees. We shall however deal with *Periya-purāṇam* later.

The hero of *Sīvaha-sindāmaṇi* is Sīvahaṉ, a prince and

[1] *Sīvaha-sindāmaṇi*, Samājam edit. Preface, p. 19.

a prodigy in all the arts, not unlike Udayaṇaṉ of *Peruṅgadai*. The epic is really the story of his love-conquests. As in *Peruṅgadai*, there is ample variety in the love-episodes. The epic is divided into thirteen cantos—the first being devoted to the story of Sīvahaṉ's birth and upbringing while his father's enemy was in possession of his kingdom; the next to Sīvahaṉ's bestowal, upon his friend, of a girl offered to him in marriage; the next seven to his conquest of seven beautiful girls; the tenth to his conquest of his kingdom; the eleventh to his coronation; the twelfth to his marriage with his eighth wife; and the thirteenth and last to his giving up of his kingdom and retiring to an ascetic life. The epic is, therefore, known as 'the epic of marriages'. Not a bad plan of treatment for an ascetic author, and it is said that his *guru* rather doubted if he could really dwell upon so much love without injury to his creed. To prove his disciple's firmness the *guru* asked him to write upon a fox that ran by, whereupon the disciple so crammed his poem[1] with sentiments of the instability of life that the *guru* was satisfied!

The author's name, by the way, is Tiru-t-takka-dēvar. He seems to have been patronised by the Gaṅga king Satyavākya Koṅguṇivarmaṉ (A.D. 908—A.D. 950)[2]. The story of *Sīvaha-sindamaṇi* is taken from the Sanskrit works *Kshatra-chūḍāmaṇi* and *Gadya-chintāmaṇi* of the ninth century[3].

We are not able to dismiss *Sīvaha-sindāmaṇi* summarily, on account of its immense popularity, which leads us to look on it with a little more attention. For some unknown and unjustifiable reason these are said to be *The*

[1] *Nari-viruttam.*
[2] *Sīvaha-sindāmani*, Samājam edit. Preface, p. 21.
[3] Ibid, pp. 21-22.

Five Major Epics in Tamil—*Sīvaha-sindāmaṇi*, *Silappadihāram*, *Maṇimēhalai*, *Vaḷaiyāpadi* and *Kuṇḍala-kēsi*—of which the two last ones are not available and *Silappādiharam* is the only great work. The greatness of *Maṇimēhalai* and *Sindāmaṇi* is very much open to question.

Yet it is not to be denied that there is a decided charm about *Sīvaha-sindāmaṇi*, the charm of its language in particular, the charm of its metrical forms, and on occasions, the charm of its handling of love-episodes. *Sīvaha-sindāmaṇi* makes delicious, often intoxicating reading. It is like heady wine, and we can quite understand that princes given to luxury loved to revel in it. There is that about it which will while away a weary hour—something, though closely allied to the Fleshly School of Poetry in England, only more frankly sensuous in both sentiment and diction.

As for the narrative itself, it is not uninteresting and, if, at the end of his love-adventures, the hero takes to penance, one feels that, that also is the natural outcome of so much love-making. The only thing that we cannot reconcile with it all is the element of moralising into which the author breaks out.

There is one surprise that awaits the reader of *Sīvaha-sindāmaṇi*—the astounding resemblance in language to Kambaṉ. The author of *Sīvaha-sindāmaṇi* is certainly a master of the art of versification, and the art of making his language arresting. Alliteration, assonance, puns, pretty turns of phrases, imagery—in those the methods of the two are so alike that one feels that Kambaṉ knew his *Sīvaha-sindāmaṇi* inside out before he launched on his work. Critics have pointed to the ring of Kambaṉ's verse. Unfortunately, there are verses of *Sīvaha-sindāmaṇi* which, if detached from the context, could make us start and say, 'Why, this is Kambaṉ!' Quite a

well-known writer has expressed the view that 'kamba-rasam is kāma-rasam,'[1] that is, 'the pleasure of Kambaṉ is the pleasure of eroticism'. Alas! The criticism of eroticism really belongs, with full justice, to *Sīvaha-sindāmaṇi*. What is *Sīvaha-sindāmaṇi* wanting in, if we shudder at the very idea of naming it and *Kamba-rāmāyaṇam* in the same breath? It is the great spiritual force, the hunger and thirst for righteousness, the love of man and of the god in man, the insight into human nature, the still, sad music of humanity—all that makes Kambaṉ supreme. For the secret of Kambaṉ's style is not merely the lusciousness of words or his similes and pretty tricks and phraseology—it is certain things which only the bard and the seer know, and of which the author of *Sīvaha-sindāmaṇi* could not so much as have dreamed. *Sīvaha-sindāmaṇi* is fine pastime for the luxuriously inclined and it gives terribly dangerous stimulation to the senses. And, besides, the absence here of what is awful and bewildering certainly appeals to the man of the world who would rather escape from such things as he would not care to understand. If there is one book in Tamil literature that should be banned for the young, it is *Sīvaha-sindāmaṇi*. It is true, that Kambaṉ's apprenticeship to it is evident. But Kambaṉ, whether as plagiarist or as pupil, was above the danger of getting stuck in the bog. Yet, the crime that Tiru-t-takka-dēvar has committed against society is the real source of his popularity.

The beauties of *Sīvaha-sindāmaṇi* are, however, not a few. We will take, for want of room, just two stanzas at random. This is how a woman courts Sīvahaṉ. Her courtship is sly and seductive. She culls flowers

[1] Aṇṇādurai, C. N., *Kamba-rasam*, p. 8.

and throws them into the lifted end of her dress, 'glances slightly' at him, and stands with 'bowed, smiling face'. And Sīvahaṉ? He simply looks at her whereupon 'she trembles like a creeper, while her ear-ornaments sparkle and sway, and hides herself in her dress as lightning hides in a cloud'. The mating of birds and other creatures under the sun is what we repeatedly find in the human characters—if they can be called characters—of *Sīvaha-sindāmaṇi*, and never 'the marriage of true minds'. Yet Tiru-t-takka-dēvar is very picturesque, very realistic and vivid, and probably, in days when mind and soul are not held to be of account, his work would still continue to be relished and praised. However, we might at least acknowledge that Tiru-t-takka-dēvar's pioneer use, among other metres, of some of the musical metres from the *bhakti* hymns for epic purposes, is a real contribution to Tamil.

6. Sūḷāmaṇi

Like *Sīvaha-sindāmaṇi*, *Sūḷāmaṇi* also is a Jain story. It is the story of a king who, after living a life crammed with good things, takes up asceticism as the path to heaven. He sees his son Tiviṭṭaṉ married to a beautiful princess, and before the story ends Tiviṭṭaṉ's son also gets married. *Sūḷāmaṇi* means crest-jewel, and is the name given to the illustrious grandfather who gives glory to the world by his penance. Unfortunately he is a very feeble, shadowy character, the main interest of the story being centred on Tiviṭṭaṉ, his romance and his feats. Besides, one does not see what especial merit there is in a very old man abandoning the pleasures of life.

It is strange that, like the other Jain works which should have preached austerity, the dominant note of *Sūḷāmaṇi* is one of sensuousness, though it is not as superlatively

sensuous as *Sīvaha-sindāmaṇi*. The style is very sweet and decidedly more chaste, lighter and more easy flowing than *Sindāmaṇi*, and here also, at its best, it reminds one of Kambaṉ. The story is also not crammed with too many women, though romance is the prime concern of the few women who do appear. Occasionally there are lovely hits, as for instance, when Tiviṭṭaṉ's bride, to hide her instinctive smile upon seeing the groom's folk, lifts a flower to her face and begins assiduously smelling it. There are scenes and characters to remind one of Kāḷidāsa's *Maḷavikāgnimitra*. Quite likely, the author, Tōlāmoḻi-t-tēvar, was a Sanskrit scholar. The work makes easy, pleasant reading, but it fails in its prime concern, namely, to make the preaching of austerity convincing in a love-story. It is perfectly competent work, but the requisites of greatness are many, and *Sūḷāmaṇi* can have no pretensions to them.

It is not easy to understand why *Sūḷāmaṇi* has been grouped along with four inferior works to form what is called *The Five Minor Epics*. The story of *Sūḷāmaṇi* is taken from the Sanskrit *Mahā-purāṇa* of the ninth century. A Sanskrit *slōka* mentions *Sūḷāmaṇi* after *Sindāmaṇi*.

7. Miscellaneous Epics

Nīla-kēsi, a Jain work, is pure propaganda. It shows how Nīli, a notorious demoness, has been converted by a Jain ascetic and made a preacher of Jainism. It is full of religious controversy, and seems to have been an answer to *Kuṇḍala-kēsi* in particular. Several of the Jain epics now lost have been written to serve the cause of religious controversy, which seems to have been pretty heated about this time. *Vaḷaiyāpadi* which was famous in its

day is lost except for a few of its stanzas which are found incorporated in later works. *Piṇgala-kēsi*, *Añcaṇa-kēsi* and *Kāla-kēsi* were all apparently works of a controversial nature as indicated by the suffix *kēsi*. *Amirdamadi* is another Jain epic about an unchaste wife. Woman shows here a miserable creature indeed.

Kuṇḍala-kēsi was a Buddhist work written by one Nāga-gupta. A few of its stanzas are available, and its story, which is interesting, is also known. Kuṇḍala-kēsi, the heroine of the story, falls in love with a convicted robber led out to execution. Her father manages to get a pardon for him, and the romantic marriage is celebrated. One day the wife pricks her husband's vanity by inadvertently, unwittingly reminding him of his past. Angered, he takes her up a hill on a false pretext, and there reveals that he is going to punish her by rolling her down. She resolves not to be cheated and begs him to grant her one last favour—that of circling her husband thrice as a sanctifying rite. Granted that, she takes her opportunity and pushes him over the edge, to his death. Disillusion-ment and disappointment drive her then to seek salvation as a Buddhist nun. The work *Kuṇḍala-kēsi* seems to have been very popular in its day. Judging from a later re-ference it was an ambitious work. It had been archaic in expression like *Peruṅgadai*, but the artistic element seems to have been pronounced. Perhaps the loss of this epic is a real loss. Another Buddhist narrative *Bimbisārakadai*, also lost, is said to have been written about this time.

With these lost Jain and Buddhist epics, we might number a few Hindu religious epics[1] of which only the names are left. To these we might also add a few narra-

[1] *Kaṉṉivaṉa-purāṇam*, *Ashṭādasa-purāṇam*, *etc.*

tives[1] and dramas[2] of a historical nature. Their loss is a cause for real regret, as we could naturally have expected them to contain much valuable information.

8. Periya-purāṇam

Now we come to one of the two major works of the period. *Periya-purāṇam* is also called *Tiru-t-toṇḍar-purāṇam* or the Story of the Holy Śaivite Devotees. It is written by Sēkkiḻār. It is said that he was disturbed to find the king getting unduly interested in *Sīvaha-sindāmaṇi*, a Jain work. His intention was to provide the king with a Śaivite work that would be uplifting as well as interesting. And *Periya-purāṇam*, the narrative of the loves of Śaivite devotees, was the result. There is no doubt that the work is healthier, more ennobling, than *Sīvaha-sindāmaṇi*, and though it might not have been of quite as much absorbing interest for a monarch sunk in luxury, it is intrinsically far more than a merely competent work. If *Sīvaha-sindāmaṇi* is the story of a man who married eight women out of sheer sensuality, the story of *Periya-purāṇam* is that of the marriage of the deity Śiva with devotees whose beauty was the beauty of the soul.

We have lightly touched upon the lives of the chief Śaivite devotees when we came across their poetry, and hence we will not pause much over the account of Sēkkiḻār. Of course, Sēkkiḻār has mixed up history with myth and legend, but that is not beyond our understanding considering the warmth of his religious zeal. And though the work is in imitation of an epic, perhaps

[1] *Rāja Rāja Vijay am*, *Kulōttuṅga-cōḻa-saridai* and *Vīraṇukka-vijayam*.

[2] *Rāja Rajēsvara Nāḍaham* and *Pūm-puliyūr Nāḍaham*.

Sīvaha-sindāmaṇi, the structure is very loose indeed. The unifying factor is intended to be the most interesting tradition of Sundarar's life. But Sundarar, with whose life the work begins, is quite often clean forgotten in the course of the narrative, to be brought up later once or twice for some serious consideration, and occasionally for a mere passing mention. But sixty-three are the Śaivite devotees selected for individual treatment, apart from a group of others, and so Sēkkiḻār could not be expected to knot the whole into a neat fabric.

Though *Periya-purāṇam* is long and rambling, monotony is avoided by the immense variety of approach to the deity. One man manifests his devotion by simply playing on the flute in honour of Śiva; another gives up his wife to Śiva upon the latter's demanding her, in the guise of a Śaivite *bhakta*; another, for fear of not being able to redeem his word passed to a devotee, tries to dash his head against a rock, and is prevented in time. Many and strange are the freaks of love, and to be sure, the poem is not the less interesting for that reason.

Of the sixty-three lives, interesting as Sundarar's is, the most fascinating is the life of Kaṇṇappaṉ, the ignorant huntsman, whose love for the deity Śiva is sorely tested till the point of his giving up his eyes for the sake of his idol. Kaṇṇappaṉ lights on an image of Śiva in the forest, keeps it company out of pity for its loneliness and brings it meat for its food—he cannot bear the sight of the image seated hungry before its flower-offerings. Now the Śaivites abhor meat as an article of food, and Kaṇṇappaṉ knows just enough of the world to taste the meat first before he makes the offering! Then he brings water in his mouth, having no better vessel. The image accepts his offerings and then, to show off its devotee to its high-caste priest, proudly directs him to see what

is to follow. Very beautiful, full of feeling, is that stanza:

'All his form is love of us;
All his wisdom is knowledge of us;
All his deeds are sweet to us; therefore,
Come and see his state'.

Then in the priest's presence the image runs blood from one eye. Kaṇṇappaṉ stops it with his own eye, since herbs fail. Then the other eye also runs blood. As the poor huntsman is about to dig out his other eye with his arrow, the image stops him. The gods shower flowers. And Kaṇṇappaṉ is accepted to stand on the right hand of the deity Śiva.

The story is movingly told. In sentiment it is the forerunner of that most beautiful collection of songs on the story of Nandaṉ by Gōpālakrishṇa Bhārati. It has, more or less, a cosmopolitan tone, of making the service to the deity common to all who love Him irrespective of class and attainments. What is important is love, pure and simple, and not rituals showy and complex. One can also detect here the subdued tone of Śaiva Siddhānta philosophy, by now developing in Tamilnad.

There are a few love-episodes also, for *Periya-purāṇam* is by no means puritan in outlook. Sundarar himself is drawn to two women, and though it is rather strange to him being pulled both ways, the tone of the love-making is anything but sensual. Very beautiful are some of the descriptions of the young women, who through their marriage with a servant of Śiva, find access to the deity. This is how Sundarar feels upon his first love:

'A flowering branch of the *kalpaka* tree? The wealth of the god of love?

The grace of all grace? A creeper that flowers a moon
bearing a raincloud?
A miracle? Śiva's mercy? I cannot tell!'

It is love, but love sanctioned by the deity. And as for Sambandar, who occupies a formidable portion of the book, he and his bride and his bridal party are all bodily transported to Śiva's presence.

The author of *Periya-purāṇam* is a poet in grain. There is no question of that. But he has not very much bothered about the artistry of the composition. It is a simple, plain narrative, and the chief motive of it is religious propaganda, namely, to show the beautiful relationship between Śiva and his devotees. The fine sensibilities of the poet, however, prevent it from being mere propaganda and often deeply spiritual values are unfolded. The vision of the poet does not indeed probe into the recesses of life with the uncompromising directness of Kamban, nor is it able to invest man with anything like an equal loftiness and beauty of character, nor is the dialogue anything so dramatic and gripping, nor even is his mastery of words, or his skill to blend and change his metres at will, comparable to Kamban's. Yet, Sēkkiḻār's is a beautiful story or garland of stories, and at times even touches heights of sublimity. Comparisons are after all odious, but Sēkkiḻār's is the second greatest work of the period, and one cannot therefore help measuring the distance between the first and the second.

Upon Sēkkiḻār's work the Brahministic religion has left its stamp; and it does not seem to us that it has bettered it. It has even affected slightly the Tamilian reverence for noble womanhood. And the poet who could write so movingly about Kaṇṇappan, in another story is brought to the extremity of making the god Śiva demand that his

devotee Tiru-nāḷai-p-pōvār, a poor outcast, should enter the fire and be purified from his low caste, before he could be accepted into the sacred presence. If Nambi-āṉḍār-nambi should say that an outcast devotee destroyed by entering the fire the disgrace of his low birth, one could understand it, for after all it is not very easy for man to rise above one's traditions, particularly, long traditions. But, if Sēkkiḻār, who belongs to the tradition of the *Kuṟaḷ* and the tolerably generous tradition of the Sangam age, should be reduced to prescribing such a method for the Pulaya's attainment of religious respectability, it only shows the tremendous grip the priesthood had managed to acquire on the people during the *bhakti* age. The theory of racial superiority had been generally ignored by the people in the Sangam age, though Brahmins were held in respect even then. In the age of the Jains and the Buddhists it was known but condemned and scoffed at. And yet the people who had known the very heights of moral and spiritual greatness had now forgotten themselves to accept a tradition which lent support to the same theory. Such is the power of religious enthusiasm. The Tamils had, through their deep human experiences, already rent the veil from the shrine of life. In the Brahministic religion and literature the veil still hung as a heavy and respectable curtain, with the dust of the ages on it, and in their newly found ardour for the shrine rather than for life the Tamils were gradually replacing the veil.

The materials used by Sēkkiḻār for writing out his *Periya-purāṇam* are mainly *Dēvāram* and the works of Nambi-āṇdār-nambi, especially his *Tiru-t-toṇdār Tiru-andādi*. Sēkkiḻār seems to have made use of tradition and inscriptions also. Unlike the other epics of the period, the sources of *Periya-purāṇam* are purely indi-

genous. In the matter of the choice of metre again he is very often guided by *Dēvāram*.

Sēkkiḻār was a native of Kuṉṟattūr of Toṇḍai-maṇḍalam, of the Vēḷāḷa community. His name was Rāmadēvar, Sēkkiḻār being the name of his family. From what he says we infer that he was the contemporary of the Chōḷa king Aṉapāyaṉ identified with Kulōttuṅga II (A.D. 1133—A.D. 1150).[1] He was apparently a minister under him with the title Uttama-cōḷa-pallava-rāyaṉ. His chief religious predilection was for the deity of Nāgēśvaram of Chōḷanāḍ, and probably it was he who built the temple of that name in his own village. His *Periya-purāṇam* is a more beautiful structure than his temple. So now, to Kambaṉ.

9. Kambaṉ's Irāmāvadāram

The king of Tamil literature represents the Tamil mind at its ripest and noblest. This is the moment for us to consider, in brief retrospect, the makings of that mind. First and foremost comes the mostly pagan enjoyment of life, as we see cultivated in the Sangam times. Religion here hardly goes beyond the worship of spirits, and is somewhere on the level of popular superstitions, though the *vēdic* gods are not unknown. But here is the admiration for courage, the joy in youthful love, the delight in the simple details of natural beauty, and above all things, the passion for fame. Reputation is the watchword of the Sangam kings and chieftains, and its flaming banners are hung out over every page of the master-mind. Of course, life is not so simple as all that, and in the background of the Sangam lurks an undesirable aspect, in the element of prostitution. Yet the people had as yet no complicated and slippery philosophies to bother about, and they took

[1] Rājamāṇikkaṉār, *Periya-purāṇa-ārāycci*, p. 43.

life as they took their food and drink, without questioning much except the taste of it. But the strange bent of the human mind inevitably leads to complexities, and the complexities of the Sangam mind as seen in its poetry, are exercised in the elaborately conventional framework of its literature. This is something which did not suit Kamban̲, for the scope of his work certainly did not admit artificial restrictions. Yet his respect for those conventions is evident, for in that beautiful stanza on the Gōdāvari[1] he compares the flow of the stream to the flow of poetry along the five *tiṇais*. And the Sangam descriptions have certainly arrested him, for he coolly plagiarises from them. Their acute observation of Nature, since they did not have much else to think of, is something at which even he could not be a match for them. They rejected conceits. If they said that the young one of the boar was finely striped[2] it was just because they had seen it to be so. What a departure from them have later poets made, including the Kavi-c-cakkaravartti? And that perhaps is the reason for Kamban̲'s apologising to 'the true bards of the triple Tamil lineage'.[3] As for life as the Sangam poets saw it, at least in one point that also has impressed Kamban̲. Sīta's love at first sight for Rāma, before her marriage, is Sangam love. It is a purely pagan love, an impulsive, natural, yet holy love, the first love of a young girl who knows the dictates of her true heart.

The second major influence on the lives of the people was the awakening of the ethical consciousness in the post-Sangam period, by the impact of Jainism and Buddhism. Both these elements were from the north, Sanskrit

[1] *Āraṇiya-kāṇḍam*, Murray and Co., edit. *Pañcavaḍi-p-paḍalam*, st. 1. [2] *Aiṅguṟu-nūṟu*, st. 265.

[3] *Kamba-rāmāyaṇam*, *Pāla-kāṇḍam*, Murray and Co., edit. *Pāyiram*, st. 5.

and Prakrit. Both having been, even in their origin, forces of reform against the practised Brahminism of the times, the ethical element is very strongly pronounced, and often worked out to exaggerated limits. It is significant that the *Kuṟaḷ*, the gospel of Tamilian ethics, was written by a man with Jain leanings. Yet, in one very important fact the Tamilians, with Vaḷḷuvar in the lead, have rejected Jain and Buddhist ethics, and that is in the attitude to woman. The spirit of valour and chivalry in the previous age had naturally led to the worship of beauty and woman, and the existence of prostitution as a disturbing element in society must have come to invest good and noble women with a certain degree of sanctity. Vaḷḷuvar treats womanhood with a decided reverence, asserting that they are the best guardians of their honour, and uplifting the ideal of monogamy for man. It was not just accidental that even the Jain and Buddhist epics, *Silappadihāram* and *Maṇimēhalai*, have a woman as the central figure, and woman's nobility as the theme. No amount of aspersions cast on woman from foreign sources could shake the native reverence for the honour and greatness of a good woman. Virtue was not a thing imposed by laws on woman, nor was it a fig, but a very real thing imbibed by her as the chief foundation of her emotional stability, which could not therefore be discarded at any cost. Then, there are other items of conviction, concerning an honourable man's conduct in general, and the essential basis of a man's greatness, dealt with in the *Kuṟaḷ*. No man who is not the victim of purely selfish interests would dare to deny Vaḷḷuvar's codes of honour. It is precisely these codes of honour, bearing on man and woman, that Kambaṉ is following in his work.

Man, poor soul, loves to enjoy life. But he also has the natural desire to do the right thing, and he gladly and

thankfully accepts the prophets who point out the way, that is, where selfish interests do not intervene. Hence the hold of the Sangam poets, and the hold of the *Kuṟaḷ* and *Silappadihāram* on the Tamilian mind. But there is yet a third vital urge which cannot be long ignored, namely, the urge for worship. The need of a personal God to love and worship has been felt by man throughout the ages. As long as the Brahmin priests were in the temples talking of philosophy and conducting rites in the Sanskrit their influence extended only to the higher spheres of life where their scholarship was prized. But the Tamil *bhakti* poets came, and that did it. The wave of devotion that swept the country changed its face. Purely secular ethics were no longer satisfying. The poets that sang of sunshine and love and then of glorious man, now sang of the mysterious Power that they had learnt to imagine in the guise of human personalities. Of course, there was a good deal of philosophy inherent in the movement. But the people left the applause of the philosophers to the scholars and wiseacres, to drink deep at the *bhakti* waters that their poets had given them. The *bhakti* movement had, however, unfortunate subsequent results. The hyper-importance of Sanskrit studies was vitiating the Tamil vocabulary, replacing indigenous words by Sanskrit ones even where unnecessary and undesirable. But worse, it was introducing a hitherto uncommon species of unhappiness in Tamilian society, the unhappiness due to caste-distinctions. With the system of Manu now firmly in the background, among a people whose vital interests were entrusted to them, the priesthood would perhaps have been supermen if they had not taken advantage of the situation. As it was, the natural thing happened—the tragedy of society. Had the priesthood been able to free themselves

of the complexes which they preserve from Manu, they might have made themselves loved, honoured and accepted into the bosom of Tamilian society out of the great regard which the Tamils have always had for erudition.

What has all this to do with our mighty bard? Why, here was he working on a plot taken, in most of its details, from the Sanskrit, a story which has been criticised publicly, in modern times, as favouring racialism. Like the *bhakti* poets, he also was dealing with the theme of the godhead revealed in a human personality. But, he has rejected in toto the theory of the inferiority of one race to another. A microscopic inspection of his work will reveal with what terrible intelligence he has confounded the trends of the times. He indulges once in unqualified praise of the Brahmins, but a sharper look shows that he has allotted that edifying speech to a Brahmin[1]. He deliberately makes Rāma insist on man's character as the only factor that decides his status among human beings. His Rāma makes the hunter sit by his side, and is the most democratic-minded of heroes. With careful calculation, he makes some of Rāvaṇa's people call Rāvaṇa an Ārya, just as Rāma himself is called Ārya[2]. He has safeguarded against reflections on the Dravidian character by making the Kishkinda search party leave their country, and cross the Chōḷa, Chēra and Pāṇḍya territories before they reach Laṅka[3]. The epic is not free from hymnology and philosophy, but with deliberate, magnificent art he bestows them only on the very minor characters[4]. He

[1] *Ayōttiyā-kāṇḍam*, Murray and Co., edit. *Mandarai-sūḻcci-p-paḍalam*, sts. 14-18.

[2] *Yutta-kāṇḍam*, Murray and Co., edit. *Kumbakaruṇaṉ-vadai-p-paḍalam*, st. 93.

[3] *Kiṭkindā-kāṇḍam*, Murray and Co., edit. *Nāḍaviṭṭa-paḍalam*, sts. 29-31.

[4] *Āraṇiya-kāṇḍam*, Murray and Co., edit. *Kavandaṉ-paḍalam*, sts. 40-48; *Yutta-kāṇḍam*, Murray and Co., edit. *Nāhapāsa-p-paḍalam*, sts. 250-261 etc.

loads Rāma with a hundred thousand religious epithets and yet leaves on our mind the impression of only a most splendid man, of whom one feels, like Sīta, that 'those who knew him but a day would give their lives for him'[1]. He gives life and colour, and even magnificence of character, to Rāma's enemies, to make Rāma still more superb. As it is, Kambaṉ's Rāma is the loftiest giant who ever strode through the grounds of an epic. Kambaṉ, as an artist, had difficulties which Shakespeare never experienced. Shakespeare had only to avoid the name of God and Jesus to avoid shocking his public. Kambaṉ's public was a hyper-critical one subject to a thousand and one prejudices. Unless he surmounted them his work could not even have been passed as a religious work and hence would have been doomed in the face of his religious-minded public. As it is, his work does not seem to have been passed without a fight, and even now hardly enjoys the full favour of people having strong caste-prejudices, though in the face of his stature they are forced to maintain a silence.

So the incorruptible has indeed not been corrupted, whatever be the influence. But to say all that is not to deny the extent of the debt he owes to Sanskrit. He has not stinted his thanks either. Quite apart from Vālmīki, the direct source of his work, he owes a lot, or it would be better to say that he has been influenced a lot by Kāḷidāsa. The suggestions for many of his love-scenes seem to have been helped out by Kāḷidāsa. He has taken hints from *Raghuvaṃsa* and worked them out to wonderful dramatic purpose. All this he owes to the *bhakti* movement, which placed the best creative works of a rich language within reach of one of the greatest creative forces of all time. That debt, of course, is a fact not to

[1] *Āraṇiya-kāṇḍam*, Murray and Co., edit. *Irāvaṇaṉ-sūḷccippaḍalam*, st. 13.

be questioned, even though Kamban has skyrocketed his epic clean out of the Sanskrit atmosphere.

So we observe three major currents of influence—the Sangam spirit of sheer aesthetic enjoyment, the *Kuṟaḷ* spirit of ennobling ethics, and the *bhakti* spirit of devout worship fostered by a religion in the shadow of Sanskritism before the day of Kamban. We have only traced the main trends, but it would hardly be necessary to say that the trends could not have always been kept strictly separate. For instance, even in the Sangam age the *vēdic* religion had been present, but it was then a very feeble, possibly new undercurrent, and had not left much impression on its literature. It was certainly not on a mass-scale. Similarly even in the *bhakti* period, Sangam art had not fully died out. But yet it would be true to say that it is in Kamban's own creation that the three currents run into one broad stream, and the effect is spectacular.

One tends to forget, at the end of *Kamba-rāmāyaṇam*, that the work is mainly a Vaishṇavite work, for every other motive is here subjected to the large outlook of humanity. But one should bear in mind that Rāma is made out to be really an incarnation of Vishṇu. There have not been too many Vaishṇavite compositions in this period. There are signs that Vaishṇavism had a hard time then. The famous Vaishṇavite philosopher Rāmānuja had to make good his escape to Mysore, as Tamilnad was getting a little hot for him[1]. Oṭṭakkūttar proudly says how his patron Kulōttuṅga served the cause of Śaivism by suppressing Vaishṇavism[2]. Perhaps that is the real reason for Kamban's not having found his way to the patronage of the mighty Chōḷas. Yet what

[1] Gōpinātha Rao, T. A., *The History of Srī Vaishṇavas*, p. 11.
[2] *Kulōttuṅga-cōḷan Ulā*, 39.

room have we for such regrets considering the epic as it now stands?

Certain facts should be borne in mind before approaching Kambaṉ. In the first place, the epic is, emphatically, not a translation of Vālmīki. He has taken the plot, and the plot in many of its details, from Vālmīki. He has taken the division of the epic into Books, and their sub-division into Cantos, from Vālmīki. Its plan thus superficially bears a closer resemblance to Vālmīki's than Tulasidas' *Rāmāyaṇa*. This looks like a large debt enough. But this is the sum and substance of his debt to Vālmīki. Perhaps this was the major factor that stood in the way of Kambaṉ's being known to the western scholars who were interested in Tamil. They were probably under the impression that Kambaṉ's is a translation, or at best an imitation of Vālmīki's work. The West has by now secured its competent English translations of Vālmīki. And it never had any use for imitations.

The English reading public, again, is given to understand that Kambaṉ has simply retold the story of Vālmīki 'in his own inimitable style'. An inimitable style can mean many things. But it just does not touch our understanding of Kambaṉ. *Sīvaha-sindāmaṇi* is in an inimitable style. *Naḷa-veṇbā*, to which we have not yet come, is in an inimitable style. Avvai's sweet, crisp sayings are inimitable in style. All works of any literary standing are in some kind of inimitable style or other. The phrase can have no meaning with reference to Kambaṉ.

Then, Kambaṉ's attitude to Brahminism is not a very essential feature of his greatness. His had been after all the accepted Tamilian attitude before his day, and he had just managed with caution to stem clear of the oncoming tidal waves. It is unquestionable that the Brahministic

view of life limits one's vision of the great and the beautiful, but within its strict limits there have been poets like Kāḷidāsa. Kambaṉ's universality of outlook, it is true, takes him far beyond the shot and range of Kāḷidāsa's vision, but just because one says that a Brahmin is a Pulaya's equal in God's eyes, one does not become a great man or a great poet.

Another very important fact to remember is that *Kamba-rāmāyaṇam* is not, like the other *Rāmāyaṇas*, primarily a religious work. It is quite likely, almost a certainty, that Kambaṉ was a Vaishṇavite and wrote for a Vaishṇavite audience. Yet Kambaṉ has scant respect for the gods. He makes them out to be cowards and slaves trembling at their master's strength[1] and they look ridiculously small by the side of his Rāma. Even the *vēdic* gods are not very big[2]. His prime concern is to show Rāma as 'the sea of goodness', because, he says, 'It is not easy for me to show the mysterious state of God'[3]. He comes very close in imagination to the Christian vision of God in the beauty of Christ—except indeed in the single fact that the Christian cannot afford to care for fame and valour, and fame and valour are just short of being everything to Kambaṉ and his characters. That explains why the poet does not bother about the gods' discussion of the incarnation, and why he is not interested in showing off the glory of Rāma-rājya with Rāma ruling the earth. For him the story lies in the mental preparation of the hero, then his being crowned with the thorns of life and finally his victory over unrighteousness. It is a terrific plan, and goes to the mark with an unfaltering, deadly aim. The presiding deity of *Kamba-rāmāyaṇam*, then,

1 *Sundara-kāṇḍam*, Murray and Co., edit. *Sambumāli-vadai*, st. 50.
2 *Sundara-kāṇḍam*, Murray and Co., edit. *Pāsa-p-paḍalam*, st. 39
3 *Pāla-kāṇḍam*, Murray and Co., edit. *Pāyiram*, st. 2.

is not Vishṇu, but that very real though unseen thing called Dharma. Dharma goes weeping after the exiled Rāma[1]. Dharma stands and strikes its eyes as Rāma falls on his brother's lifeless body[2]. Dharma takes a breathless interest in every step in the last great war. Only, this Dharma is not exactly Manu's Dharma, nor is it exactly like Christian Dharma, but it is Tamilian Dharma, distinguished by its ardent, perhaps excessive, love of fame, generosity, valour and heroic womanhood.

The epic is modelled on the grammar for the Sanskrit *kāvyas*, not on the old Tamil epics *Silappadihāram* and *Maṇimēhalai*. Kambaṉ's scholarship is evident in every page of his work. To satisfy the requirements of the Sanskrit *kāvya*, he had to know the *Kāmasūtra*. Whether he draws directly from the *Kāmasūtra* or at second-hand from Kāḷidāsa, he takes every opportunity of revelling in erotic descriptions. His finer sensibilities have indeed prevented him from bringing Rāma and Sīta into a picture of this kind. But the criticism of flagrant breach of decency in several passages in Kambaṉ, is perfectly just. It just cannot be explained away as being Oriental in taste. It simply is not. Witness the clean, wholesome record of the pre-*bhakti* age Tamilian poetry. This new tendency is obviously the result of the growing Sanskrit influence. The same is the case with conceits. Conceits were looked upon as false coin by the Sangam poets. But by Kambaṉ's day, conceits had obtained a license. Facts could be falsified if only they could be prettily told. Why, most of Sambandar's nature-description is imaginary and extravagant. So Kambaṉ finds plenty of pre-

[1] *Ayōttiyā-kāṇḍam*, Murray and Co., edit. *Nahar-nīṅgu-paḍalam*, st. 1.

[2] *Yutta-kāṇḍam*, Murray and Co., edit. *Piramāttira-p-paḍalam*, st. 195.

cedents for his conceits. They are some of them very big. The flags of a city wipe the smoke from the clouds[1]. When a giantess walks, the earth gives way so that her legs go deep into it, and the sea water rushes in to fill the pits she leaves behind. Yet he can show his hand even in the field of conceits. For instance, he wants to say that the ladies in a bridal procession have very large eyes. He shows a girl seated on a she-elephant[2]. A tusker, in the procession, raises its trunk to caress the she-elephant. The girl is scared in her seat, and puts her hands before her eyes. Her eyes, however, are so large, that her hands will not hide them! The naughty suggestion is obvious. There are conceits and conceits. And Kamban can wear his conceits with a difference.

One is taken aback by the vast size of the book. It shows the stupendous ambition of the author. Kamban has, of necessity, had to put in quite a deal of padding. Fourteen are the pitched battles in the last war, and there is plenty of narrative without the human interest that is the hall-mark of Kamban's genius. Kamban's only excuse for the padding is that he has left nothing that is not tolerably interesting, and that really the story as he handles it would be far too tense without it. The padding provides some sort of agreeable relaxation. Anyway, the reader hardly ever loses interest through the length of about forty-thousand lines of the epic. The *Yutta-kāṇḍam*—the Book of War—or the last Book is a vastly ambitious epic in itself, in length equalling the *Iliad*, and breaking sharply away, even in plan, from the restraint of Vālmīki's plot into exultant freedom. Here it is that we hear the poet's deepest tones. The Book alone, so far as we know, is like nothing we have in Indian literature. Hardly

[1] *Pāla-kāṇḍam*, Murray and Co., edit. *Midilai-k-kāṭci*, st. 3.
[2] Ibid, *Eḷucci*, st. 38.

less glorious than that is the tightly-compressed and compact *Ayōttiyā-kāṇḍam*, which is an epic of character-development, of ideals fighting against ideals, of love striving against love. Here we very rarely hear the poet's own voice, but only the voices of his characters. Thus the length of the epic is justified by the immense variety of mood and treatment. It is as though the poet resolved that he would find for his creative instinct a field that was broad enough. So broad a field it is indeed, that one of the dramas of Shakespeare or poems of Kāḷidāsa could be conveniently accommodated in the room allotted to one of the episodes in it. *Kamba-rāmāyaṇam* is hardly an epic. It is an entire literature in itself. It could be compared to nothing less than Homer in his attitude to heroism, to Shakespeare in his probing into the human feelings and his handling of dialogue, and to Milton in his mighty torrents of poetry. You could not compare Kamban̲ with any but the very greatest on the world's stage of literary achievement. Seven centuries and more have gone by after Kamban̲, and to the Tamilian mind, one of the world's wonders is its ignorance of him.

The main difficulty in our treatment of such a poet is, therefore, what are the aspects to be considered. The field of research in Kamban̲ is vast as the sea, were it but in the detection of his faults, which are many and real, and the interpolators who have tampered with his text. Our present aim can hardly be more than a bare introduction of our most dearly cherished poet to those who are truly interested in the wonders of the human mind.

The story of the national heritage of the *Rāmāyaṇa* is this: Rāma, prince of Ayōdhya, marries Sīta, princess of Mithila. Rāma's step-mother, designing the throne for her son Bharata, claims a long-promised boon from her aged husband and exiles Rāma to the woods. Sīta and

Rāma's devoted brother Lakshmaṇa follow him, while the king dies of grief. Bharata refuses the crown. In the woods the sister of Rāvaṇa, king of Laṅka and the time-honoured enemy of the gods, seeks Rāma's love and is rejected. In vengeance she instigates Rāvaṇa to carry away Sīta. Rāvaṇa manages by a trick to separate Sīta from her husband and Lakshmaṇa, and carries her away to Laṅka, where, however, he is not able to wear out her wifely faith. Rāma, meanwhile, makes allies, finds out Sīta's place of captivity, and demands her release. War follows. The enemy is destroyed and Sīta is restored. Eventually Rāma is crowned in Ayōdhya. It is positively a beautiful story, a story with immense dramatic and poetic possibilities, and different poets of the Rāma-story have placed emphasis on different aspects of the story.

What are the most noteworthy features of *Kamba-rāmāyaṇam*? To the young enthusiast, as yet a stranger to the deepest and most vital values of life, the first thing that takes by surprise is the absolute command of the art of versification. The poet has handled the *kali*, the *viruttam* and the *tuṟai* metres. He has so changed and moulded them at will, that more than ninety different variations are perceptible in the epic. Indeed no other Tamil poet has used as many. It is not necessary for Kamban that he always stick to any one metre for a particular artistic purpose, for his cards are not a few. He brings pathos to laments with long vowels. 'Aṉṉēyō! aṉṉēyō!' wails Rāvaṇa's wife over his dead body.[1] 'Nārāyaṇaṉē! taṉināyahaṉē!' laments Sīta thinking of her husband[2].

[1] *Yutta-kāṇḍam*, Murray and Co., edit. *Maṇḍōdari-pulambuṟu-paḍalam*, st. 22.

[2] *Sundara-kāṇḍam*, Murray and Co., edit. *Urukkāṭṭu-paḍalam*, st. 6.

But long vowels are not everything with him. Metre in Kamban is a very vast study, but it has no room here. We may acknowledge here that he is somewhat indebted to *Sīvaha-sindāmaṇi* and *Sūḷāmaṇi* for his metre.

Then there is the language of Kamban. It would be no exaggeration to say that the poetic possibilities of the Tamil language had been exhausted by him. You are indeed not aware of its possibilities till you come to Kamban! The stuff that his language is made of is not cent per cent Tamil. There is a fair percentage of Sanskrit. But the Sanskrit is never obtrusive, and though it is enough to be offensive to the purist school of Tamil writers, it has been used only to strengthen and enrich his vocabulary, never to vitiate and pollute. Look at the poet's choice of words from the Sanskrit. Of the words for crown, he freely uses *mauli*[1], and *mahuḍam*[2]. Catch him using *kirīṭam*! His ear is far too faultless for that. Even when he does use Sanskrit words with sounds foreign to the Tamil language, he tones down the sounds to suit the native genius. For instance, Tamil has no 'sh'. Kamban, in a context, wants to use the word *bāsha* for language. *Moḻi* is a beautiful Tamil word for 'language', but metre rejects it in the context. He switches over to the Sanskrit word, which becomes *pāḍai*[3] in his hands. His wide scholarship and unerring instinct rendered possible the absorption of quite a number of Sanskrit words into Tamil without doing it an injury.

But what of Kamban's poetic style with which his command of metre and language are interwoven? To

[1] *Ayōttiyā-kāṇḍam*, Murray and Co., edit. *Nahar-nīṅgu-paḍalam*, sts. 1 and 2.

[2] Ibid, *Kaikēyi-sūḻviṉai-p-paḍalam*, sts. 80 and 85.

[3] *Pāla-kāṇḍam*, Murray and Co., edit. *Pāyiram*, st. 10.

know one's Kamban is to be half a poet. He can catch your ear and whirl you away in a dizzy whirl of sounds when the fancy takes him. Should he be in the mood for a bit of nonsense he can compel you to sit through it and then take the laugh in the end. Kamban's verse is famous for its mellifluousness, that is, when he has no purpose in making it hard and jerky. But one much-praised quality is absent in the style—that is uniformity. The stately tread of Milton's verse is heard now and again in him, but only when the occasion demands it. In the main, Kamban's style is marked only by an easy elasticity. Should he describe a wrestling match, his language becomes the language of action. A word is a movement, a stanza is a reel of movements. The Vāli-Sugrīva fight[1] shows this. Should he present two characters arguing, his language is not heard at all. The lofty background music of his great stanzas comes to a halt, and you only see the actors whispering, arguing, pausing, taking up the argument again. How he brings out Lakshmaṇa's stammering explanation to his brother, about his having had to leave Sīta alone[2]! The words are brought out in a rush; even grammar is abandoned.

So it is really no use trying to define and reduce Kamban's style to any consistent quality. Its word-values are keenest and most acute when Rāma speaks, though most generous of scope when Hanumān or Kamban in his own person is speaking. Take but one instance of Kamban's compressed word-values. When Rāma is in the forest, Bharata comes with his people to beseech him to return. Lakshmaṇa, hearing the noise of the hosts, is quick to suspect Bharata's intentions. In angry grief he goes to

[1] *Kiṭkindā-kāṇḍam*, Murray and Co., edit. *Vāli-vadai*, sts. 55-57.

[2] *Āraṇiya-kāṇḍam*, Murray and Co., edit. *Saḍāyu-uyir-nītta-paḍalam*, sts. 66 and 67.

his brother, bow in hand, and gives him a piece of his mind. Rāma is hardly able to convince him of the injustice of his suspicions. But just then Bharata himself appears in the distance, weary and unkempt, having cried like a baby, a worn-out ascetic. Rāma, in suppressed exultation, points him out to Lakshmaṇa with these words: 'Young lord of the sounding bow! You, look closely, at the angry warrior-guise of Bharata of the mighty hosts and chariots![1] And Lakshmaṇa, turning to look, lets the bow slip from his hand. But the point here is the suggestiveness of those words of Rāma's. He points out that Lakshmaṇa is young in wisdom and that he is too ready to sound the bow. And underneath it all, we sense the pride that Rāma takes in his beloved Bharata, and his sorrow at the calumny that Lakshmaṇa has cast on him. All this is a matter of two lines with Kambaṉ.

To see Kambaṉ's style at its best, we can only point to a few, a very few, of his beautiful stanzas. Here is one showing Rāma and Sīta, with Lakshmaṇa walking through the forest. The joy of a new-found freedom is in their confident footfalls. Hear the intoxicating rhythm of this joy:

'mā'hándámu máharándámum áḷahándáru mádiyíṉ
pā'hándáru núdalā'ḷóḍu pávaḷándárum ídaḷā'ṉ
mē'hándáṉi váruhíṉṟádu míṉṉō'ḍéṉa míḷirpū'ṇ
nā'hándáṉi váruhíṉṟádu píḍiyō'ḍéṉa .náḍavā''.[2]

Would it not be fine to hear the measure of another kind of footfall? Shūrpanakha, princess of Laṅka, decked out in finery, comes pacing into Rāma's presence with the confidence of her beauty and the jingle of her anklets:

[1] *Ayōttiyā-kāṇḍam*, Murray and Co. edit. *Tiruvaḍi-sūṭṭu-paḍalam*, st. 48.

[2] Ibid, *Kaṅgai-p-paḍalam*, st. 4.

'páñciyoḷir víñcukuḷir pállavama ṉúṅga
céñceviya káñcanihar síṟaḍiya ḷā'hī
áñcoliḷa máññaiyeṉa áṉṉameṉa míṉṉum
váñciyeṉa náñcameṉa váñcamahaḷ vándāḷ."[1]

But these are after all, 'the cloudy border of the base'. The heights are always to be found, as usual in all poetry, in the tragic situations. Look at Rāma, going with the doom of exile on him, to see his mother who had hoped he would be crowned.

'Without the swaying *chauri;* without the white umbrella;
While Destiny, pulling, led the way; and Dharma,
weeping, went behind;
Before her who thrilled and budded with pleasure to
think and think,
"He like the raincloud will come with the crown on",
the one man went alone"[2].

Or, look at Rāvaṇa, retiring from the battlefield after his first taste of defeat at Rāma's hands:

'The bosom that braved the mammoths; the shoulders that lifted the mountains; the tongue that spoke as glibly as Nārada's; the garlanded crowns; the sword given by Śiva; and, his valour: all these he left on the battlefield, and, empty-handed, entered Laṅka'.

This is the martial music that announces such a fall as that:

'vāraṇam poruda mārpum, varaiyiṉai eḍutta tōḷum,
nārada muṉivar-k-kēṟpa nayambaḍa uraitta nāvum,
tāraṇi mauli pattum, saṅgaraṉ koḍutta vāḷum,
vīramum kaḷattē pōṭṭu veṟuṅgaiyō ḍilaṅgai pukkāṉ.'[3]

[1] *Āraṇiya-kāṇḍam*, Murray and Co., edit. *Sūrppaṉahai-p-paḍalam*, st. 24.
[2] *Ayōttiyā-kāṇḍam*, Murray and Co., edit. *Nahar-nīṅgu-paḍalam*, st. 1.
[3] *Yutta-kāṇḍam*, Murray and Co., edit. *Kumbakaruṇanvadai-p-paḍalam*, st. 1.

Here is no deliberately cultivated Grand Style, but a style that is grand from the combination of thought, feeling and diction. There is that about it which makes the grandeur an inevitable thing, a burst of the creative spirit exulting in its vision and its power to express the vision. From the spell of harmonies such as these, no Tamil poet after Kambaṉ ever escaped.

It is worthwhile just glancing at one or two of the images in Kambaṉ. Rāma, after he has had news of Sīta in Laṅka, stands facing the great sea that lies between him and his unhappy wife. In a very beautiful stanza,[1] you see the sea tossing its waters as though it were shaking up a mat for Vishṇu to sleep on. Underlying that image is the feeling of great weariness, the longing for death and rest, that the poet brings out in the watching Rāma, who has been through such a long suffering, and between whom and hope lies the great sea. Close on the heels of that image comes an equally beautiful one, that of the playful infant breeze which had been crawling on the waters, and which 'would not go' without painting Rāma all over with the golden pollen from the *puṉṉai* trees on the beach[2]. On the one hand is the picture of the breeze, innocent, frolicsome, which loves to play its pranks on the big man on the shore. What could it know of the silent suffering of that man? On the other hand is the picture of the big man himself, lost in his own world of sorrow, feeling the little fellow quite a tease, that 'would not go' and spare him. Kambaṉ did plagiarise on occasions a few similes. His 'lotuses flowering even from the windows'[3] come straight out of Kāḷidāsa.[4] Yet where

[1] *Yutta-kāṇḍam*, Murray and Co., edit. *Kaḍal-kāṇ-paḍalam*, st. 3. [2] Ibid, st. 5.

[3] *Ayōttiyā-kāṇḍam*, Murray and Co., edit. *Mandira-p-paḍalam*, st. 53. [4] *Raghuvaṃsa*, Canto VII, 11.

there is a great experience to be expressed by a great, powerfully suggestive image, Kamban never had to look beyond himself. Look at a monkey shivering in the rains[1]. Was there ever such a restless creature as a monkey? The rains have frozen his activity in him. Well, the Tamil poet compares the helpless, stone-stiff creature to an ascetic doing penance, and leaves us to wonder or laugh just as we may please!

That brings up another feature of Kamban—his humour. The Tamil language is not particularly rich in humour. Laughter of the hale, hearty type is almost unknown in high-class Tamil literature, though *Kali-t-tohai* shows some crude attempts at it. Nor is there much scope for laughter of that kind in a work like Kamban's, which is so deeply tragic in tone. Happy laughter, and happy children are two aspects of life that you do not, cannot, meet with in such a creation. But there is tragic humour, and thunderous laughter in many a situation that Kamban creates for the purpose. Witness the dramatic context in which Hanumān, after playing havoc with Laṅka, is brought face to face with Rāvaṇa. Hanumān knows that in his safety lies the safety of Sīta. Hence he says that he has come to Laṇka on an embassy from Vāli's son. Rāvaṇa knows the situation inside out. Vāli had been killed by Rāma with an unknightly shot from his hiding place, and unlike the other *Rāmāyaṇas*, Kamban's has spared Rāma the pain of explanation for his conduct. But Rāma's enemies make the most out of this single blemish of the man who had abandoned the throne to save his father's honour. Rāvaṇa has here, in his power, the man—who would call Kamban's Hanumān a monkey?—who has started the interview with praises of

1 *Kiṭkindā-kāṇḍam*, Murray and Co., edit. *Kārkāla-p-paḍalam*, st. 75.

Rāma. Well, he shall teach the fellow a lesson. So, with a laugh, he asks: 'Messenger of Vāli's son! Is the brave Vāli doing well? His kingdom, is it undisturbed?'[1] It would be for Hanumān to tell the shameful story. But Hanumān is no fool. He catches the insinuation. He has his own fling at Rāvaṇa, who, on a former occasion, had been humiliated by Vāli and tied to Vāli's tail. So, with a thunderous laugh, he replies: 'Do not fear, Rākshasa! He is gone to heaven, the fierce, warlike Vāli; he'll not come back; his tail, too, is gone'.[2] It is this kind of humour that we find in Kambaṉ, particularly towards the close of the book. It is this humour that gives such zest to those great battles. You do not meet with any of this in the book of Rāma's youth where all is sugar and spice, but from the day of the abduction of Sīta it gets a footing.

It must certainly be accepted that Kambaṉ has a flair for dramatic situations. The Vibhīshaṇa-Kumbhakarṇa meeting is one of the most moving episodes in all story. It extenuates Vibhīshaṇa from any suspicions we might have of his having deserted his brother for Rāma. Both his brother and his ally seem to feel that he has an eye on the crown of Laṅka, but the pure generous feelings of which his heart is capable are evident in the scene in which, with Rāma's permission, he falls at Kumbhakarṇa's feet and begs him with tears to come away with him, away from death and disgrace. But our hearts swell with Kumbhakarṇa's as he makes his answer: 'Out of love for this bubble of life, without giving my life for him who brought me up so long and made a warrior of me, I cannot go there!' Then, with sadness and pride, he continues: 'With this bosom wounded with arrows, I, who have seen Death shake, cannot serve another to live'.

[1] *Sundara-kāṇḍam*, Murray and Co., edit. *Piṇi-vīṭṭu*, st. 78.
[2] Ibid, st. 79.

Let the preacher interpret the scene as he pleases, to show how Kumbhakarṇa obdurately chooses his own doom. The layman is proud of the choice that Kumbhakarṇa makes, in that tense, heart-searching interview. There are situations and situations. Scott, in the nineteenth century, had much enjoyment in pitting Coeur de Lion and Friar Tuck against each other, in that boxing episode. The epic poet has his own motives in arranging a boxing match between Rāvaṇa and Hanumān. It is conducted in almost the same spirit, Rāvaṇa and Hanumān hardly parting as enemies, but as warriors admiring each other's valour. In Kāḷidāsa you just find a hint that Lakshmaṇa was wounded by Rāvaṇa. Wouldn't it be fun to see what Kambaṉ has made of it? Well, the javelin was really meant by Rāvaṇa for Vibhīshaṇa, his treacherous brother. The javelin is of such divine nature that it must take life. And it would be highly detrimental to Rāma's honour to let Vibhīshaṇa be killed. So occurs one of the most heroical struggles of which ever a minstrel sang. Lakshmaṇa hastens to intercept the weapon. Vibhīshaṇa senses the motive and makes a dash before him. Aṅgada pushes both of them back. Then Sugrīva and Hanumān, both contend for priority in taking the thrust. Finally, Lakshmaṇa succeeds in bearing up before them all and receiving the fatal weapon on his chest. This is the situation that the Tamil bard has created, and no man could have so well brought out the spirit of it either.

And dialogue. The Tamilians have no drama worth the name. But separate the dialogue from the context in Kambaṉ and allot it to the respective characters, only leaving out the interpolations. How many dramas, of what magnitude, would one not find in *Kamba-rāmāyaṇam*! When dialogue begins, Kambaṉ forgets himself. For a taste we shall have just one conversation. This is the

context. Rāma is exiled. Lakshmaṇa is furious. He takes up his bow and twangs it, his challenge to Rāma's enemies. But Rāma also hears. He hastens to the spot.

Rāma: My dear one! What is the reason, that you, who have never been angry, should, in battle-array, thus take up the bow?

Lakshmaṇa: I am resolved, so that you may be crowned in the face of that black-souled woman who destroyed truth and disowned you, to destroy whoever opposed me, like cotton before fire, should they be the gods themselves. The victorious bow being in my hands, they would not stop me; if they should, I would burn them as targets for my arrows, and, today, the seven worlds and seven, with the right of protecting the kings, I shall make yours.

Rāma: Is not your wisdom always in the right path? How then does this anger, that dries up passionless Dharma and slips from righteousness, come to be in you?

Lakshmaṇa: (laughing) Your father giving you this vast earth, you took it. When he said, 'Lose it to your enemy and flee to the woods', why, indeed, should your servants burn with anger? When those who did not love you drive you to the distant woods, am I, bearing this base body of the senses, to cherish this life, like the cruel monarch, who before my eyes, offered you the crown and then said, 'No'?

Rāma: I did not consider then that the crown breeds evil. When the sovereign said, 'Take the crown', was it not my mistake to have accepted it? What is the king's fault, you of the sword like lightnings and sunshine? It's not the river's fault if there's no

sweet water. This is not our lord's fault; nor the fault of her wisdom, who bore and reared us; nor her son's fault. Son! It's Destiny's fault. Why then do you fume at this?

Lakshmaṇa: My seething heart, like the fire roused by the bellows, how shall it be soothed? You just watch my bow's might. It shall be a lesson to the wisdom of her who caused this grief, a strength to the gods, a destiny to Destiny.

Rāma: (more coldly now) My lord! Would you say whatever your lips suggest, with the tongue that spoke the Scriptures? What you say, it's hardly what the righteous would speak! How could you grow sick so of our father and mother?

Lakshmaṇa: (passionately) You are my father. You are my lord. You are she who bore me. There is none else for me. You who have learnt to be generous! See this conquest today.

Rāma: She, who had the boons, is queen of the world. When she and my peerless father spoke, Bharata shall have it. Now, the wealth that I shall obtain is penance. What is better than this hereafter? My lord! Is your conquest to be by the defeat of your faultless elder brother? By a victory over a peerless father, praised by the sages? By a victory over her who bore us?

Lakshmaṇa: I have earned the blame of our enemies. These two lazy, rising hills, my shoulders, I bear. My quiver, and my strong bow, I am born to bear. What use indeed is there in my anger? (when you prevent me)

Rāma: For myself, it is not right to rule, disregarding the word of my father who counselled me and brought

me up. But you, what disgrace is it to you to disobey my word?[1]

And that is how Rāma overcomes Lakshmaṇa's anger. The reader will observe that the emphasis is sharply shifted from the ethical values, Hindu values, in Vālmīki, to the emotional values of the eternal human relationships, in Kambaṉ. And that is the reason really of Kambaṉ's absolute success in his creation, of his piercing appeal to the masses of his country. Who with a human heart can shut out Kambaṉ? The great human drama that is played out in his epic is, in our opinion, the most wonderful thing ever created by the human intellect. As a matter of fact, the work is known in Tamil as *Kamba-nāḍaham* or Kambaṉ's Drama.

In such a work, then, what shall we say of the characters? We do not doubt that the names of Kambaṉ's characters are to be found in Vālmīki. But we find no division into sheep and goats in Kambaṉ. The central character is, of course, Rāma, with his single allegiance to that supreme thing called Dharma. It would have been so easy to make him a preacher and a prig. But Kambaṉ has so presented him, so full of human attachments and tenderness, that we see his heart bleeding in the fight with unrighteousness, and we are sore for him. The finest, the most delicate touches of the poet have gone into the making of this subtle character. Not the least of these touches is the reticence with which the poet has deliberately endowed him on the subject of his love. On the subject of his disgrace in the world's eyes he opens his heart to his brother. But his personal feelings for Sīta are left to inference. He sees two happy birds in

[1] *Ayōttiyā-kāṇḍam*, Murray and Co., edit. *Nahar-nīṅgu-paḍalam*, sts. 122-136.

love and 'bites his lips'. He sees two cock-birds fighting for a hen and 'lifts his eyebrows'. Dignity and tenderness are combined in him in the most wonderful degree. But one feels the poet never put a surer stroke with his brush on this character than when opposing him to Kumbhakarṇa in that wonderful battlepiece. As Kumbhakarṇa comes ranting on, Rāma, who has been told by Vibhīshaṇa of how stoutly Kumbhakarṇa had defended the cause of the helpless lady, 'smiles'. With courtesy and dignity he repeats his offer of goodwill, but the battle is made inevitable, for, Kumbhakarṇa does not feel himself in a position to exchange courtesies with gentlemen. The finest touch of all comes when Rāma's hand 'shakes' as he finds it impossible to silence the death-agonies of his noble enemy.

What of Rāvaṇa? There never was a grander personality in the role of villain in the world's dramatic literature. The magnificent description of Rāvaṇa going to court Sīta, with Ūrvaśi bearing his sword, Mēnakha his pan-box, and Tilōttama, his slippers is unforgettable. On that dark, glossy body the fine cloth of gold lies like sunlight on a rock. The scarf flows from his shoulder like a cataract leaping down a crag. The light from his jewelled anklets 'caresses' the ground. The women of his court are pining for a look of his eyes. The gods are in dread of him. Nor is his character abased by cheap conversation. His language to Sīta is the language of a cavalier. 'You have defeated me', he tells her; 'you have taught me what sorrow means'. Never once does he indulge in the repulsive coarseness of indecent language. The chief mark of this Appollo Appollyon is the disregard for Dharma. What need he care for Dharma or for the gods? It is just here that the uncrowned exile from Ayōdhya teaches him his lesson. But the human feelings

of his heart also are painfully exposed to us. As he stands contemplating Lakshmaṇa's brilliant archery, there comes to him a strange tenderness for Lakshmaṇa as he compares him in his mind with his own beloved son Indrajit. Rāvaṇa's admiration for Lakshmaṇa is almost exultant. 'Good is the fighting; good the fighter's strength; valour, good; ideals, good; fierceness, good; good, the training; good, your courage and beauty; peerless that you are!' And he actually restrains himself from aiming a death-blow at him. This same Rāvaṇa, we see later, tottering across the battlefield in search of the body of his son Indrajit, and then returning to the gates of Laṅka in suffering silence, with that huge corpse thrown across his shoulders. Indeed, death at Rāma's hands was the best that the poet could have given him after that.

So they are all giants whom we see in *Kamba-rāmāyaṇam*, but hardly men. Or, if they are men, they are men of the stature of Lear out in the storm; of Macbeth before the woods of Birnamwoods; of Hamlet discussing the questions of life and death with himself; of Othello thinking of the Arabian trees with their medicinal gum. The characters of *Kamba-rāmāyaṇam* are, in short, epic heroes and heroines, and they could hardly have been accommodated in less than such an ambitious epic. Many and great are the surprises that *Kamba-rāmāyaṇam* or *Kamba-nāḍaham* has for us. How Satrugna, who has remained an unfelt and unnecessary element throughout the vast length of the epic, suddenly springs to life with one of Kamban's great stanzas at the very close of it; how Indrajit, having played the sneak and the cheat with Lakshmaṇa time and again, still manages to twist our hearts with a sharp wrench as he goes to his doom, having distributed his wealth generously to all who asked for it, and lingering red-eyed to look again and again at that

father 'who had shown him wonderful things;' how Sīta, before leaving Ayōdhya, tells her husband, who suggests that she is creating trouble for him, 'Is that all your trouble? After leaving me here, much joy you will have!'[1]—these are but instances chosen at random.

The Vaishṇavite reader goes to Vālmīki for edification, for religion, for directions in rituals, or at best, for the pleasure of reading a sober, dignified narrative. *Kamba-rāmāyaṇam* is a work of an entirely different stamp, where great men and heroic women love and suffer and fight. Excitement is the keynote of it, and our emotions are completely at the mercy of the master-bard who manipulates them to evoke what tune he pleases. The reaction of Kamban on the Tamil reader is to make him humble and spell-bound; on the lover of world literature, it would be to make him mount to the roof-tops and crow to the world, 'Come and see!'

It is significant that, while the Tamils have gone on attempting *Mahābhāratas*, no man has dared to attempt the *Rāmāyaṇa* after Kamban. There have been *Rāmāyaṇas* before him[2], but they survive only in bits, the public not having jealously preserved them. Of the other works[3] ascribed to Kamban, none shows anything like the Kamban touch.

The problem of Kamban's date, which had been relegated to cold ashes for some time past, has once again become a topic of heated discussion in Tamilnad. One theory which rests on a stanza[4] beginning with 'eṇṇiya-sahāttam', puts Kamban, in the ninth century[5]. Leaving

[1] *Ayōttiyā-kāṇḍam*, Murray and Co., edit., iv, 227.
[2] *Rāmāyaṇa Veṇbā, Jaiṉa Rāmāyaṇam*, etc.
[3] *Sarasvadi-andādi, Saḍagōpar-andādi, Ēr-eḻupadu* etc.
[4] *Pāla-kāṇḍam*, Murray and Co., edit. p. 191, st. 9.
[5] V. V. S. Aiyar's introduction to *Pāla-kāṇḍam*, (1917).

aside the genuineness of the stanza, which itself is questioned, there is an alternative interpretation to, and another reading in, the stanza, which bring Kambaṉ to the close of the twelfth century[1]. Another theory sets Kambaṉ in the tenth century during the reign of Uttama Chōḷa[2]. It has for its support another stanza, the obvious interpretation of which again brings Kambaṉ to the last quarter of the twelfth century. Inscriptional evidence exists to show that Kulōttuṅga III (A.D. 1178-1216) was called Tiyāha-vinōdaṉ[3] to whom Kambaṉ refers.[4] A stanza attributed to Kambaṉ in the *Tamiḻ-nāvalar-saridai*, is in praise of Pratāpa-rudra Kākatya of Warangal, who belongs to the same period[5]. Besides, Kambaṉ once alludes to Amalaṉ[6]. This is no other than Kulōttuṅga (A.D. 1133-1150) of whom Oṭṭakkūttaṉ speaks[7]. Quite obviously, Kambaṉ could not have come prior to Kulōttuṅga Chōḷa. Periya-āccāṉ Piḷḷai of the first half of the thirteenth century quotes from Kambaṉ in his commentary to *Divya-prabhandam*, thus setting the latest time-limit of the poet. We do not feel that we would be very far from right if we ascribe Kambaṉ to the close of the twelfth century.

There are no reliable sources of information about the life of the greatest Tamil poet. A few later works and tradition have surrounded his name with stories. But what is more or less above doubt is that Kambaṉ was a native of Tiruvaḻundūr in the Tanjore district, of the Uvacca community, and was patronised by a chieftain

[1] *Sendamiḻ* III, pp. 171-81.
[2] *Sundara-kāṇḍam*, Annamalai University edit. Preface, p. xii.
[3] *Sendamiḻ* I, p. 122.
[4] *Yutta-kāṇḍam*, Murray and Co., edit., *Maruttumalai-p-paḍalam*, 58.
[5] See Kaḻaham edit. p. 79.
[6] *Kiṭkindā-kāṇḍam, Pilam-nīṅgu-paḍalam*, 35.
[7] *Kulōttuṅga-cōḻaṉ-ulā*, 157.

Saḍaiyappaṉ whose name Kambaṉ takes care to mention with gratitude ten times in the course of his epic. That is the sum and substance of our knowledge about Kambaṉ's life.

Some anonymous poet, upon Kambaṉ's death, has left this piercing little quatrain:

'Today the day that Kambaṉ died?
Today the day my verse shall be accepted?
Today the day, Lakshmi being happy, and Earth being enthroned,
When Sarasvadi lost her marriage thread?'[1]

Truly, the Tamil language was widowed when she lost Kambaṉ.

10. Court-poets—Jayaṅgoṇḍāṉ

We cannot ignore the secular poetry of the period. Poetry had been so widely recognized as a power to confer immortality that the kings had verses inscribed on copper-plates in their honour even before this age, to commemorate some feat or act of generosity. But in the Chōḷa period inscriptional poetry comes to be quite a recognized group by itself though it is not a particularly distinguished group. It is called *mey-k-kīrtti*.[2] Though these verses later develop a leaning towards extravagant praise, they very often contain useful information about the kings and their predecessors. Rāja Rāja Chōḷa (A.D. 980-1014) was the one to give inscriptional poetry a new turn, but the poetic achievement is not very much.

Of course these kings had their court-poets who wrote for them other kinds of poetry as well. These poets, whether second-rate or not, became Kaviccakkaravarttis

[1] *Tamiḻ-nāvalar-saridai*, Kaḻaham edit. p. 89.
[2] *Paṉṉiru-pāṭṭiyal*, 197.

or emperors of poets. We shall take up first the court-poet of Kulōttuṅga (A.D. 1070-1122), Jayaṅgoṇḍāṉ, the author of *Kaliṅgattu-p-paraṇi*. *Paraṇi* is a minor literary form like *kōvai*, *ulā* and *andādi*. It is a war-poem to celebrate the victory of a killer of seven hundred elephants[1].

Kaliṅgattu-p-paraṇi is in honour of *Kulōttuṅga's* victory over Kaliṅgam. Incidentally his commander-in-chief Karuṇāhara-t-toṇḍaimāṉ also is praised. It begins with an elaborate invocation. The next chapter is on 'door-opening'. The women of the capital are exhorted to open their doors in the morning to celebrate the victory with songs. In the next chapter the devils are introduced. They are shown against their natural background, the fearful wilderness. This is followed by the description of the temple of Kāḷi, the goddess of destruction. The goddess is a horrible apparition, wearing snakes and elephant-skin. The rites with which men serve her are equally horrible. They sprinkle blood on the floor, strew bits of fat instead of flowers before the goddess and illumine the temple with torches from the funeral pyre. The deity's attendants are devils, lean and famished through want of human meat. A visitor-devil displays its feats before them, conjuring a battle-scene till the devils are mad with blood-lust. It is also made to extol the Chōḷa monarch's glories, recounting in detail the prowess of his forefathers. The goddess herself chimes in, giving a gorgeous picture of the Chōḷa going hunting, when a devil arrives on the scene panting with great news. The great battle is actually fought! With mouths watering, the devils rush in a wild stampede to the battle-field. The poem closes on the misery of the women from the enemy's country.

[1] *Paṉṉiru-pāṭṭiyal*, 144-145.

The poet's plan, thus, seems to be to show the love-hungry women of the Chōḷa land, then to proceed to the devilish havoc that has been caused by their husbands in the battlefield, and then to the unhappy women of the land that opposed the Chōḷa king.

Very high praise has been bestowed on the poem. 'A Jayaṅgoṇḍāṉ for a *paraṇi*' is the saying. Certainly Jayaṅgoṇḍāṉ's *paraṇi* is, not merely the first of the extant *paraṇis*, but also the best of them. Its fields are those that are rarely attempted in art—the fantastic, gruesome and grotesque—and perhaps all these three fields have not been treated with more vividness elsewhere in Tamil literature. There are touches of humour also. The Brahmin devil gapes for the tasty soup (of course of stinking corpses) and begs for some of it; the Jain devil which does not take life and eats only once a day is to be given the strained soup; the Buddhist devil, which goes about wrapped in skins, could be given the delicious brains of the dead. At puns too the poet is quite clever. Occasionally one even fields a pretty touch, as when he says that the women wear in their luxuriant tresses, not merely the red flowers, but the very lives of the young men. When the widowed women of the Chōḷa's enemies are shown looking for their husband's bodies, pathos creeps in unawares. Even in the art of versification, Jayaṅgoṇḍāṉ's is no mean achievement. He has handled a variety of *sandams* in adjusting the *tāḷisai* metre now and again to suit his convenience. His brilliant use of onomatopoeia is pointed out by poets to show how he suggests the sound of battle-drums.

'eḍumeḍum eḍumeṉa eḍuttadōr
ihaloli kaḍaloli ihakkavē
viḍuviḍu viḍupari karikkuḷām
viḍum viḍum eṉumoli mihaikkavē.'

The spirit reflected in the poem is the spirit of blood-lust, and perhaps it was the spirit of the king's warriors. *Kaliṅgattu-p-paraṇi* is not a silly or weak poem, and that it affords a definite species of recreation, is unquestionable. That, to the historian, Jayaṅgoṇḍāṉ is more important than Kambaṉ, is also unquestionable.

But one feels that the praise lavished on the poem needs to be qualified. *Kaliṅgattu-p-paraṇi* lacks breadth of vision and depth of experience. It has no message. It does not speak to the hearts of thousands. It is a court-poem, a poem for the warlike and blood-thirsty, but not a poem of the elementary human emotions. It is a strange excuse advanced for the eroticism of the piece, that it should be viewed as a piece of art. Such is the poet's eroticism that it does not even spare the god Śiva and his wife Kāḷi. One feels that art could have done very well without it. It is a still stranger thing to pin the glory of the Chōḷa king on the tears of the unhappy women of his enemy's country. As for the actual battle-description, a fight is not all made of din and blows and commotion. It is the storm of human passions that is mainly involved. What has Jayaṅgoṇḍāṉ to do with them? To test the poem as a battle-piece, you have only to lay it alongside one of Kambaṉ's battle-pieces. *Kaliṅgattu-p-paraṇi* will then stand suddenly exposed as an imitation diamond. The impression it leaves is that of a nightmare—of devils and corpses and sex-hungry women and weeping widows—but not that of a treasure to keep for life, no, not even if it should have achieved the highest praise as a work of art.

11. Court-poets—Oṭṭakkūttaṉ

Oṭṭakkūttaṉ is a very big name in Tamil literature. He was called Kaviccakkaravartti or Emperor of Poets, Kavirākshasaṉ or Giant Poet and Vara-kavi or Divinely-

gifted Poet. These are not, any of them, particularly small names. But Oṭṭakkūttaṉ's chief claim to them, we may take it for certain, was the fact that he was poet-laureate at the grand court of Vikrama Chōḷa (A.D. 1118-1135), of his son Kulōttuṅga Chōḷa (A.D. 1133-1150) and of his son Raja Raja Chōḷa (A.D. 1146-1173). It was a dignified office to hold, and Oṭṭakkūttaṉ was fully qualified for it by his vast erudition in Tamil as well as Sanskrit. But we are concerned with him only as a poet, and a Tamil poet, and Oṭṭakkūttaṉ's position in the long line of Tamil poets is a modest one.

Oṭṭakkūttaṉ has left on record fifteen works, of which not all are available. The *Mūvar-ulā* is a collection of three *ulās* in honour of the three monarchs whose patronage he enjoyed. We have already seen the subject of the *ulā*. It is the glory of the king going in procession, and captivating all hearts, particularly the hearts of the women of his country. There is not very much scope for the play of genius in such a plan, and Oṭṭakkūttaṉ's style certainly arrests by its Miltonic tread. Oṭṭakkūttaṉ is called Kauḍa-p-pulavaṉ or Poet of Majestic Style, and he deserves the appellation so far as pure sound-values are concerned. It must be remembered that all the artistic opportunities of the poem are in the description of the women. Oṭṭakkūttaṉ has made some use of them. Here is part of his description of the young girl who has crossed the threshold of childhood.

'Her lisp she has given her parrot;
She has taken instead the flute's sweetness.
Her former smile was the jessamine's;
Now her smiles are like pearls.
Her innocent look she gave her fawn;
Her eyes are now dangerous and sharp'.

The poet maintains some sort of variety in the three *ulās*, and one does not complain of tedium, but then the most that can be said of the *Mūvar-ulā*, is that it gives an impression of stately movement, of processional grandeur. The poems, apart from being Oṭṭakkūttaṉ's best, are the best in their field, though it is a limited field. Yet one must be thankful for the historical data supplied by them.

Oṭṭakkūttaṉ's *Kulōttuṅga-cōḷaṉ Piḷḷai-t-tamiḻ* is remarkable as the first of the poems of its kind in Tamil. Even before him poets like Periyāḻvār and Kulasēharāḻvār had revelled in imagining gods as children. It was Oṭṭakkūttaṉ who developed the idea into a definite literary form called the *piḷḷai-t-tamiḻ*. He imagines Kulōttuṅga Chōḷa as a child. That is the subject-matter of the poem. But even here Oṭṭakkūttaṉ shows no sensitiveness to the graces of the childhood of his royal patron's son.

Takka-yāha-p-paraṇi is Oṭṭakkūttaṉ's *paraṇi* on a battle between Śiva's general and his father-in-law. This interesting *purāṇic* story is taken from the Sanskrit, and the story is handled perhaps to emphasize the greatness of Śiva in contrast with the other gods of the Hindu pantheon, Vishṇu not excepted. This trend is but natural, since Oṭṭakkūttaṉ was a Śaivite and Vaishṇavism was falling into disfavour in the eyes of the court. In this poem also the poet maintains a stately and dignified style, inclining to hardness rather than softness. He employs *sandams*. Here is a stanza to show the plan of one *sandam:*

'maḍíndaṉa kúvalaya válayamē;
iḍíndana kúlahiri évaiyumē'.

The plan of the *sandam* is as follows:

Taṉándaṉa táṉataṉa táṉataṉa

The poem may be less capable of arresting attention than *Kaliṅgattu-p-paraṇi*, but its artistry also is competent. And it certainly is on a more dignified level without stooping to the stark eroticism of *Kaliṅgattu-p-paraṇi*.

Yet, taking Oṭṭakkūttaṉ's achievement by itself, what do we have? No brilliant flashes of imagery as in the Sangam poets. No ecstatic flights of song as in the *bhakti* poets. No overpowering faith in the beauty of life and the glory of human nature as in Kambaṉ. What we have is a high-sounding style, a resonant arrangement of words. Even their meaning becomes slippery through the *sandams*. For the resonance of Oṭṭakkūttaṉ's style, the high percentage of Sanskrit words is responsible. For Oṭṭakkūttaṉ's Tamil is a highly Sanskritised Tamil, and just short of becoming *maṇi-pravāḷa*. He does not even bother to avoid the use of frequent cerebrals or the compound consonants as in

'kāḍu pōhu caḍāmu ḍikkapi ḍēha maṇḍaka pālamē
ūḍu pōha ananda kōḍisa *hatra* tārai oḷukkavē'.[1]

The result is that on occasions the hardness of his style borders on a ruggedness alien to the genius of the Tamil language.

Oṭṭakkūttaṉ's achievement, then, is a courtly style. But that which is the life of great poetry, the great meaning of life, the real meaning of beauty, is quite lost in him. It becomes an offence to the poetic sense to say that Oṭṭakkūttaṉ was an emperor of poets.[2] He was only an emperor's poet.

We might as well mention here that Oṭṭakkūttaṉ was born in Malari in Chōḷanāḍ.[3] It appears that he, in his youth, had been supported by Saṅgaraṉ of Puduvai,[4]

[1] *Takka-yāha-p-paraṇi*, VIII, 378. [2] Ibid, XI, 14 and 15.
[3] *Taṇḍi-alaṅgāram*, 8, eg: ii. [4] *Cōḷamaṇḍalasadaham*, 93.

father of the Saḍaiyappaṉ who has the honour of presenting Kambaṉ to the world. Another patron of his was Kāṅgēyaṉ on whom he composed a *kōvai*. He seems to have been strongly drawn to Sambandar, and he must have lived to a ripe old age. That is about all we infer of his life.

Of course, there were many other court-poets too, composing poems in praise of the Chōḷas and their chieftains. But the poems that have survived and are worth mentioning are but few.

12. Grammar

It might have been noticed from the foregoing chapters that grammatical works have been practically ignored. The commentaries on *Iṟaiyaṉār Kaḷaviyal* and *Yāpparuṅgalam* which most likely belong to this age mention about twentyfive earlier works, it is true, but only a very few have survived. Since there is a great burst of grammatical works during this period, some of remarkable quality, we shall do well to consider them briefly here even though we are primarily concerned with literature proper, and we shall commence by roughly tracing back the line.

We have already mentioned *Tol-kāppiyam* as the earliest extant grammatical work in Tamil. *Ahattiyam*, to which is given the pride of priority by tradition, does not, in our opinion, go earlier than the post-Sangam period. It is supposed to be an elaborate book dealing with the three time-honoured sections of Tamil grammar—*iyal*, *isai* and *nāḍaham*, namely, literature, music and dance. After *Ahattiyam* grammarians seem to have confined themselves to one or another of these three sections. Thus we have works like *Avinayam*, *Perunārai* and *Paradam* mentioned as treating literature, music and

dance respectively. *Iyal* itself, to start with, had only three sections, *eḻuttu* (letters), *sol* (words) and *poruḷ* (poetic theme). Later on, sections and sub-sections of *iyal* came to be treated in separate books. For instance, *Iṟaiyaṉār Kaḷaviyal* is a book on *aham*, a section under *poruḷ*. *Paṉṉiru-paḍalam* and *Puṟapporuḷ-veṇbā-mālai*, which probably is an abridgement of the former, are treatises on *puṟam*, another section under *poruḷ*. Again *Sēndaṉ Tivāharam* is a development from *uri-iyal*, one of the sub-sections under *sol* of *Tol-kāppiyam*. Similar is the case with prosody. The inrush of new metrical forms from the Sanskrit resulted in the production of a large number of works on prosody. The importance thus attained by prosody was perhaps responsible for the four-fold classification of *iyal—eḻuttu*, *sol*, *poruḷ* and *yāppu* or prosody. Among works on prosody may be mentioned *Saṅga-yāppu*, *Mayēccurar-yāppu* and *Nāladi-nāṟpadu*. The growing emphasis on the study of prosody led to another importation from the Sanskrit. A new type of grammar called *pāṭṭiyal*, dealing with augury in poetry and minor verse-forms, came into being. *Ahattiyar-pāṭṭiyal*, *Paṉṉiru-pāṭṭiyal*, *Pāṭṭiyal-marapu* and *Indira-kāḷiyam* are examples. Of all these works, *Iṟaiyaṉār-kaḷaviyal*, *Sēndaṉ Tivāharam*, *Puṟapporuḷ-veṇbāmālai* and *Paṉṉiru-pāṭṭiyal* alone have survived the ravages of time.

It is fortunate that quite a number of the grammatical works of the Chōḷa period are extant even now. *Yāpparuṅgalam*, an ambitious work on prosody was written by a Jain, Amudasāharar, probably towards the close of the tenth century. The same author presented also a condensed version of the same work in *Yāpparuṅgala-k-kārihai*, the most popular work on the subject. The grammar of the period has taken on another aspect, namely

poetics, dealing with figures of speech. The four-fold division of *iyal* thus becomes five-fold including poetics. We come across a book in Tamil, that treats the five sections separately, for the first time, in the second half of the eleventh century. This is *Vīrasōḻiyam* written by Puttamittiraṉ, a Buddhist. Perhaps, *Tamiḻ-neṟi-viḷakkam*, of which a portion of *poruḷ* alone is now available, is also a similar work. Among works on poetics, the earliest work seems to be *Aṇi-iyal*, but it is lost. The most popular work, however, is *Taṇḍi-alaṅgāram*, written in the first half of the twelfth century.[1] It is a translation of the Sanskrit *Kavyādarśa*, just like the chapter on poetics in *Vīrasōḻiyam*. Thus it is quite obvious that poetics as an elaborately developed subject was also introduced from the Sanskrit. We have on record the protest of local grammarians who strongly disapproved of elaboration and classification of poetic ornaments as such.[2] Really we find that excessive emphasis on poetics has served only to pollute and degrade. The voice of protest, however, went unheeded, and external ornamentation came to be codified and insisted upon, with what disastrous results may be inferred from the decadent literature of the post-Chōḷa period. For *pāṭṭiyal* and *nihaṇḍu* we have only two representatives, *Veṇbā-paṭṭiyal* of Kuṇavīra Paṇḍidar and *Piṅgala-nihaṇḍu* of Piṅgala Muṉivar. *Nambi-ahapporuḷ*, the most popular work on *aham*, also was produced in this period.

13. Grammar—Naṉṉūl

Pride of place among the grammatical works of the Chōḷa period must be given to *Naṉṉūl*. Indeed there is no grammar in Tamil to dispute its honoured position,

[1] See Preface to *Taṇḍi Alaṅgāram*, Ed. Āṟumuham Sērvai (1920).

[2] Pērāsiriyar's commentary on *Tol-kāppiyam, Uvama-iyal*, 37.

except *Tol-kāppiyam* which is considered as the best by most Tamil scholars[1]. It is true that *Naṉṉūl* has followed *Tol-kāppiyam*, but in our opinion it is an improvement on it. In the terseness of its *nūṟpās*, in the brevity of its treatment of the subject without prejudice to clarity, and in the arrangement of its subject-matter, *Naṉṉūl* definitely excels *Tol-kāppiyam*. *Naṉṉūl* has borrowed from the Sanskrit, but has not done so without discretion. And it rightly deserves the praise that it is one of the most scientifically written grammars of the world.

Naṉṉūl, in its present form, consists of two sections only, letters and words, just like *Nēmināḍam*, though there are indications that it also included the other three sections[2] like *Vīrasōḻiyam*.

The author of *Naṉṉūl* was one Pavaṇandi, a Jain sage, who wrote the book under the patronage of Sīyagaṅgaṉ who was a chieftain under Kulōttuṅga III[3]. Kuṇavīra Paṇḍidar, the author of *Nēmināḍam* also, by the by, was a Jain sage of the same period[4].

On the whole the grammatical works of the period are in fair proportion to its literary achievement. It is significant that the finest grammar in Tamil should have been born alongside the greatest literary work. But, in general, on grammar also the influence of Sanskrit is getting very strong. Its influence in the sphere of *nihaṇḍu* or lexicon was really a healthy one. The systematic study of word-structure as *paḥudi*, *vihudi*, *iḍainilai* etc., introduced from the Sanskrit by Pavaṇandi[5] for the first

[1] *Ilakkaṇa-k-kottu*, Commentary on rule 8.

[2] Saṅgara Namasivāyar's Com. on *Naṉṉūl* (Swāmināṭha Aiyar's edit., 1925), p. 15.

[3] *S.I.I.* Vol. III, Part I, pp. 122-123.

[4] Preface to *Nēmināḍam*, Kaḷaham edit. p. 7.

[5] *Naṉṉūl*, *Padaviyal*.

time, threw a new light on the Tamil language. But the acceptance of a *maṇi-pravāḷa* style in literature[1], the introduction of augury in poetry and the giving of undue importance to poetics have done positive injury to Tamil. Western scholars have remarked how poetics has caused the decadence of Sanskrit poetry down from the sixth or seventh century A.D., and in Tamil poetry the depravity comes to be very pronounced from the tenth century onwards. But we regret that there is no room for a detailed study of grammar here.

14. Commentaries—Prose

We cannot ignore the prose specimens in this period. First comes the commentary on *Iṟaiyaṉār Kaḷaviyal*. *Iṟaiyaṉār Kaḷaviyal* is a grammatical treatise on *aham*. The commentator is supposed to be clarifying the points expressed by the grammarian. But the grammar in itself is pretty lucid, continuous, and does not much require a commentary, at any rate not such a commentary as it has obtained. The commentary is said to be by Nakkīrar of the Sangam age and the grammar by Śiva himself. While the grammar is decidedly superior to its commentary, there must be about as much truth, considering the language, in Nakkīrar's authorship as in Śiva's. The work in its present form is clearly indebted to *Sīvahasindāmaṇi* and could not have been prior to it.[2]

What is important about the commentary is the fact that it is in prose. It is not bits of unmeasured verse as in *Silappadihāram*, but pages and pages of prose. One little verse of the grammarian is dragged out through a wilderness of ornate, at times, poetic prose. The

[1] *Vīrasōḻiyam, Alaṅgāra-p-paḍalam* 40.

[2] Vaiyāpuri Piḷḷai, *Kāviya-kālam*, pp. 215-16.

author indulges in a good deal of sidetracking. Simile and metaphor illuminate his style, but clarity and simplicity, essential features of good prose, are absent. It is really interesting to see how the commentator sometimes brings in logic to confound an otherwise obvious meaning. It looks as though the commentator approaches the original with his own preconceived notions. The commentary is very entertaining for that reason. But it is more—it is a specimen of real early Tamil prose.

It has been suggested that Iḷambūraṇar has had a hand in giving the commentary its final shape.[1] It is very likely. But Iḷambūraṇar's commentary on *Tol-kāppiyam* shows a different method and style. His style is clear and simple and he writes with the intention of elucidating rather than confounding his readers with his knowledge of logic and language. He uses simile more for making his point clear than for ornamentation. But he also is guilty of occasionally thrusting in wholly unwarranted ideas. Though he was not much of a Sanskrit scholar, his partiality for Sanskrit ideas is quite obvious. His commentary truly takes us one step forward from the commentary on *Iṟaiyaṉār Kaḷaviyal* in the development of Tamil prose. He was a Jain sage and is mentioned with respect by later writers as Urai-āsiriyar or 'the commentator'. Iḷambūraṇar is also identified with Maṇakkūḍavar one of the commentators on *Tirukkuṟaḷ*.[2] And the reasons given are worth consideration.

Among other commentaries of this period may be mentioned the commentary on *Yāpparuṅgalam*, and that on *Tiru-vāymoḻi* called *Āṟāyira-p-paḍi* by Kuruhai-p-pirāṉ Piḷḷāṉ. The former is important for the references it makes to the vast number of earlier and contemporary works of

[1] Rāghava Aiyaṅgār, M., *Ārāycci-t-tohudi*, p. 405.

[2] *Sendamiḻ*, XLII, 156.

which we would not have heard otherwise. *Āṟāyirappaḍi* is the first of a series of commentaries in the *maṇipravāḷa* style on the Vaishṇavite hymns.

15. Social Developments

We have come to the end of the golden age in the history of the Chōḷas. It was an age of prosperity for the kings, and naturally of productivity for literary minds. It was an age when the temples and the priesthood were obtaining sway over the country. In every religion, absolute power given to the priesthood tends to corruption. Witness the corruption that once crept into the Catholic church. But the Hindu priests were not celibates, and that made the corruptions yet more pronounced. It meant the growth, not of a privileged profession merely, but of a privileged caste. Grouping according to profession did exist in Tamilnad, and that by itself tended to casteism; yet men of apparently not more than labourers' classes had been the finest scholars like Tiruvaḷḷuvar. The grouping became dangerous when 'divine' sanction was allowed to the priestly class, and particularly dangerous because brilliant men of that class managed to win and enjoy the favour of the monarchs. The evil, it must be re-emphasized, was not the evil of the Brahmins, but of Brahminism—not of individual men, but of a system that hardly spared its own favourites. As a result, the Brahmins, who had been a minor feature of society in Sangam days, were realising the extent of their power in the Chōḷa period.

The Sangam poet Kaṇiyan Pūṅguṉṟaṉār had confidently affirmed, 'yādum ūrē, yāvarum kēḷir'[1]—'Every city is my city; all people are my people.' The outlook,

[1] *Puṟa-nāṉūṟu*, 192.

in general, is as liberal as is possible in a secular culture. Some of the kings are subject indeed to the spell of religion, and here and there are evidences that Brahminism is not unknown. But in the main one sees life going clear and strong without much thought for it. And certainly the Tamils had not developed then an inferiority complex. But, by Kamban's day, the non-Brahmin's position was positively degraded. As interpreted by the Brahmins, religion had not been charitable to the masses, because it was coloured by the *smritis*.

Society being thus under the Brahmins, one does not wonder at the influx of Sanskrit into Tamilnad. But, curiously enough, in spite of the growing domination of a literature rich in itself, no Tamil poet of vast importance makes his appearance hereafter. Of the three giants of the Tamil world, Kamban, Vaḷḷuvar and Iḷaṅgō—for men may come and men may go, but these remain the Tamil giants for ever—we have now left all the three behind us. Kamban does come in a highly Sanskritised age. But he also, one remembers, is the giant he is, not merely because of Sanskrit influence, but also despite it.

16. Malayāḷam

About this period comes a very important development in the history of the Tamil language—the beginning of the growth of Malayāḷam as an independent language. Though Sanskrit and Brahminism had a very strong position in the Chōḷa empire, they were especially strong in the Chēra country. Śaṅkarāchārya, of the eighth century, who had captivated the minds of the Indian scholars by his Advaitic philosophy, hailed from this part of the Tamil country. The philosophy of Śaṅkarāchārya, by itself is positively arresting, but it is strange that even

in the propagation of Advaita, the indirect result should have been the excessive importance of Brahmins. Possibly that was because they were fine scholars in Sanskrit religious thought, which was far removed from the people, who really had not much indigenous religious philosophy to boast of. Saṅkarāchārya was himself a Nambūdiri Brahmin. The regard of kings now went out to those who like him could claim *ñāna* or wisdom on religious matters, which inevitably implied scholarship in Sanskrit religious thought. Vast stretches of land passed to the Nambūdiris, partly as endowments to temples and partly as free gifts to the priests. The Nambūdiris, having become substantial land-owners, were now in command of the religious, economic and political strongholds of the people.

To prevent their property from being broken up, the Nambūdiri Brahmins introduced the peculiar system of marriage by which the younger members of a Nambūdiri family mingled freely with the people. For all the Nambūdid's efforts to preserve racial superiority this mingling of blood was able to promote much deeper mutual understanding than had been possible in the rest of Tamilnad. At the same time, the Brahmin enforcement of Sanskrit was able to meet with better success. Geographical conditions also favoured the development of linguistic differences. The result was Malayāḷam. Like *maṇipravāḷa*, it is a close blending of Sanskrit and Tamil, subject, of course, to local peculiarities[1]. With the Sanskrit element predominating in both language and culture, slowly one section of the Tamils thus got cut away from their own noble heritage, and were left to fend for themselves in building up an independent language, and, of

[1] Vide Iḷaṅguḷam Kuñjaṉ Piḷḷai's *Origin and Development of Kēraḷa Bhāsha*, p. 60.

course, an independent culture. But while in one respect the tragedy is deep, in another, which is after all far more important, society has been the happier for the partial breaking down of Brahminism. In Kēraḷa today the battle between Tamil and Sanskrit is over; and while class-struggle for material benefits is strong, caste-hatred on the basis of idealogies is completely extinct. But hereafter there shall be only two Tamil kingdoms for us to consider, the Pāṇḍya and the Chōḷa kingdoms.

VI. THE DECADENT PERIOD

1200 A.D. — 1650 A.D.

1. Background

WITH THE decline of the Chōḷas, in the beginning of the thirteenth century, begins the period of decadence for Tamil literature. True, for another century the Tamil country was under the Pāṇḍyas, but there was hardly any peace for the people, for, apart from war between the Pāṇḍyas and the Chōḷas, foreign powers like the Hoysalas were already spelling trouble to them.

In the fourteenth century conditions became worse. Two Pāṇḍya princes were involved in a domestic quarrel. This facilitated the entry of the Muslims from the north. Three waves of Muslim invasion followed. Finally in 1324 A.D. a Mohammedan rule was established in Madura, which lasted upto about 1370 A.D. This meant the introduction of Islam, with its powerful assertion of universal brotherhood. But for all that, the bulk of the population recoiled in horror from a religion that had entered the country sword in hand. Many of the temples had been looted and desecrated, for the invaders were ardent iconoclasts, and did not calculate the results of such force. Persian being their language, Tamil could not have been encouraged as a language on the administrative level. What little of Muslim influence entered without force was that through the Arab traders who had settled down in Kāyal-paṭṭiṉam. With the beginning of the Muslim rule, we may consider that the story of the great Tamil kingdoms is over, and only the Tamils are left.

Quite soon the Muslim rule also was upset. In the Deccan the powerful Vijayanagar kingdom was founded

in 1336 A.D., and the feeling of Hindu-Muslim rivalry and hatred was up. The Vijayanagar general Kampaṇa, in a crusade to deliver the South from the Muslims, seized the Tamil country. It was the fear of the Muslims that caused the Tamils finally to receive the Vijayanagar army which shook off the Muslim power and established instead the Vijayanagar supremacy in Tamilnad. Under Vijayanagar, first viceroys and then the Nāyaks were ruling in the Tamil country. After 1565, the Nāyaks of Gingi, Tanjore and Madura became practically independent. The few stray instances of the Tamil royal lines striving to keep themselves from extinction are merely pitiable. Among these may be mentioned the Pāṇḍyas who were allowed to flicker out their existence in Tenkāsi as feudatories of the Nāyaks of Madura. For all practical purposes, as an Elizabethan poet put it, 'King Pandion, he is dead'.

It was now that temple rule was really and fully established in Tamilnad. The Vijayanagar rule enthusiastically championed the cause of Hinduism as we know it today. With the consciousness of the Muslim invasions still fresh, Śaivism and Vaishṇavism joined hands and polytheistic Hinduism was popularised, and different sects of Hindus[1] and different schools of Hindu thought[2] existed under Brahministic patronage, which was their chief unifying force. The *mutts*[3], it must be observed, besides their enthusiasm in popularising Hindu thought, of course among the privileged communities, were

[1] Pāsupadam, Vīra-śaivam, Sittānda-śaivam, Vaḍakalai-vaiṇavam, Teṉkalai-vaiṇavam etc.

[2] Advaita, Visishṭādvaita etc.

[3] Tiru-āvaḍu-tuṟai. Tarumapuram. Kāñcīpuram, Tiruvaṇṇāmalai, Sūriyaṉār Kōyil etc.

encouraging scholarly studies. They were the theological colleges of the day.

It need not be said that by now, Tamilnad had come to mean practically the Brahmins. Naturally Sanskrit completely dominated the literary world, and with it developed the study of religious and philosophical literature in Sanskrit. The recent violation of the temples brightened the halo round them and caused the *sthala-mahātmyas*, namely Sanskrit verses in the epic form about sacred places. In imitation of these *tala-purāṇams* were written in Tamil. Philosophical works and allegories sprang up. *Mahābhāratas* were written—no man, even in this age, has dared to attempt a *Rāmāyaṇa*, though we infer that the officious and sometimes ugly interpolations in Kamban have their growth in this age. *Purāṇas* arise. Biographies of the Āḻvārs and commentaries on *Divya-prabandham* are written in the *maṇi-pravāḷa* style. Even a few Jain works are attempted in *maṇipravāḷa* and otherwise. Minor literary forms like *kalambaham*, *tūdu ulā*, *paraṇi*, *piḷḷai-t-tamiḻ*, *kōvai* and *mālai*, used for religious purposes, throng in. But the language of these works is Tamil with a free mixture of Sanskrit, and their tone is far removed from the daily life of the common man. *Yamaham*, *silēḍai* and all the ornaments of Sanskrit literature are abundant. Here indeed is an anticlimax for Tamil.

But the period has certain relieving trends. One is the excessive attention paid to commentaries on the old classics. Perhaps scholars were stimulated by the Sanskrit commentaries and strove thus to preserve their heritage, in danger of being lost under the circumstances. Side by side with this go two other major trends, one that of the poetry of the *sittars*, and the other that of the miscellaneous wandering bards who would not allow the

great old tradition to die out. It is with these really that the great poetry of the age rests, but we will come to them in due course.

Apart from the temples and *mutts* the literature of the period received patronage from the Tamil chieftains and the remnants of the Pāṇḍya line, who were, of course, Tamil enthusiasts by tradition. Two of the Pāṇḍyās were minor poets in their right. The Vijayanagar representatives themselves and their satellites in time extended their encouragement. Yet it is noteworthy that all this did not succeed in producing great works while Tamil was overshadowed by the Sanskrit. Besides, the language of the rulers was itself not Tamil, but Telugu.

2. Naḷa-veṇbā

The epics and *purāṇas* of the period come up now for our consideration. Formidable as they are in number we are in a position to accord individual attention only to the important ones. *Naḷa-veṇbā*, the most beautiful, is first also among these in order of time. Puhaḻēndi, the author of *Naḷa-veṇbā*, has sung in praise of Āriya-sēharaṉ, one of the generals of Kulasēkhara Pāṇḍya (1268 A.D.—1311 A.D.).[1] The poet's dear patron was, however, a chieftain, Sandiraṉ Suvarkki[2]. More is not known for certain about Puhaḻēndi.

Naḷa-veṇbā is the story of Naḷa and Damayanti, taken from the Sanskrit *Mahā-bhārata*, and has made quite a popular appeal in Tamilnad. The factors responsible for Puhaḻendi's popularity, however, are hardly the virtues of the story. In brief outline, it is all about a king who

[1] Sadāśiva Paṇḍārattār, *A History of Tamil Literature* (13th, 14th and 15th centuries), pp. 11-13.

[2] *Naḷa-veṇbā* (Rājam's edit., 1959), II, 119.

gambled away his kingdom, abandoned his devoted wife in the woods at dead of night and was tricked into seeing her again by a ruse that she was to marry a second time. Fate is the predominant genius of the narrative. Yet the story is so told that we are made to sympathise with both hero and heroine, to cry with them and to rejoice with them. That is simply the art of the author, who knows the most exquisite way of telling a pretty tale and who never makes the dangerous attempt of setting foot in the recesses of human nature probably because he does not feel that he is upto it. But his narrative, such as it is, is immensely enjoyable, colourful, clear, tender, with a haunting yet chaste beauty. *Naḷa-veṇbā*, a little work of 378 stanzas, excluding interpolations[1], has well merited its immense popularity. The author is reputed for the *veṇbā*, and with justice. No other Tamil poet has given the stiff *veṇbā* form such an easy grace and sweetness in telling a story. Puhaḻēndi's handling of the *veṇbā* is very like Shakespeare's handling of the sonnet, though, of course, the comparison cannot be pursued further.

The first stanza of *Naḷa-veṇbā* is also one of the most famous ones and is a triumph of visual and musical expression:

> 'kāmar kayalpuraḷa, kāvi muhainehiḻa,
> tāmaraiyiṉ sendēṉ taḷaiyaviḻa,—pūmaḍandai
> taṉṉāṭṭam pōlum tahaimaittē sāharañcūḻ
> naṉṉāṭṭiṉ muṉṉāṭṭum nāḍu'.

Here it is in translation: 'The fish turn over; the hyacinth buds unfold; the lotuses drip honey; this is like the eyes of the lady the Earth, Niḍadanāḍ'. Colourfulness is

[1] See preface to Rājam's edit. (1959).

among Puhaḷēndi's conspicuous virtues. The swan which comes to Naḷa from Damayanti alights in front of a lake, and the poet says, 'With its whiteness the gloom of the grove vanishes; with the colour of its long feet the lake reddens'[1]. There is pathos in the parents' parting from their little ones[2] as in Damayanti's wailing in the forest over her husband's situation,[3] or her falling at her father's feet crying, 'My father! What I have endured!'[4] The pathos is keenest when Naḷa in disguise sees his children and embraces them and asks them, 'Children! You seem like my children! Whose children?'[5] The poet has the trick of charging the last and shortest line of the *veṇbā* with most of the pathos, and the trick works.

It is easy to understand and appreciate a poem like *Naḷa-veṇbā*. It would be surprising if one did not enjoy it, for Puhaḷēndi is an excellent story-teller, and knows exactly what is wanted by those who would love to weep over an old tale. And he can sing very sweet music and paint many an exquisitely pretty picture.

The poem bears the impress of Kambaṉ's influence, but is certainly no tame imitation of Kambaṉ. The achievement, modest as it is, yet justifies the author's name 'the bearer of fame' or Puhaḷēndi. It has also resulted in the attribution to him of several later works, mainly ballads. *Ceñci-k-kalambaham* by the same author is unfortunately not extant, but the only stanza preserved from it has the distinctive beauty of his style.

3. Villi-pāradam

The next on the list is *Villi-pāradam*. It is easily the best of the Tamil *Bhāratas*, though its intrinsic literary

[1] Rājam's edit, I, 12. [2] Ibid, II, 70-73. [3] Ibid, 87.
[4] Ibid, 139. [5] Ibid, III, 51.

merit is not much. As the name suggests it is a Tamil adaptation of the Sanskrit *Mahā-bhārata*, by Villi-puttūr Āḻvār. It is quite an ambitious work running to 4339 stanzas. But it consists only of the first ten *parvas*. It deals with the story of the five Pāṇḍava brothers who married Draupati and who were incited to take revenge upon their cousins the hundred Kaurava brothers for trying to insult her over and above the injury they had done the Pāṇḍavas by taking away their kingdom. A great battle is the result, in which Krishṇa, a Vishṇu incarnation, is held to be the real hero, and he ends by killing off the whole lot of warriors. The Sanskrit epic of *Mahābhārata* presents some powerful characterisation in the warriors, quite apart from Krishṇa, and Villi could not do much besides putting these characters from Sanskrit into Tamil. Villi had another disadvantage, that of coming after Kambaṉ, in the toils of whose fascination he is fairly caught and held down as an imitator. In other words, neither in characterisation, nor in form does Villi have an individuality of his own. And what is a poet without his individuality?

But the work has enjoyed a vast reputation. To be sure, it does have some pleasure to offer those who have not known its Sanskrit original and Kambaṉ. The verses are dignified and fine modulations of feeling are evident here and there as in the Karṇaṉ-episode. And then of course, there is always the religious reason. But the chief attraction is perhaps the *sandam* or the rhythmic pattern, used so often to advantage especially in battle-scenes. The choice of metre does not seem to be very happy and the range of experience within his power to command is limited. The language itself is too Sanskritised to be natural. Though the work can hardly be called unpoetical, one very often gets the feeling

of mounting higher and higher, and just when the peak is within reach, of being dashed to the ground. Expectations are raised, which are not fulfilled. Often a passage comes very near to being great poetry and then one wonders if it is poetry at all. That is mainly because Villi's versifying is not spontaneous but studied. He has cleverly caught Kambaṉ's manner, his repetitions and other tricks of style, and he works them out till they become mannerisms, almost a parody of Kambaṉ. Naturally it leaves us without the sense of poetic fulfilment.

Villi was a Vaishṇavite Brahmin from Saṉiyūr in Naḍunāḍ. He was patronised by the Tamil chieftain Varapadi Āṭkoṇḍāṉ of Vakka-pāhai. He was a contemporary of the Twin-poets who sing of the same patron and hence must have belonged to the first half of the fourteenth century.[1]

4. Other Epics, and Purāṇas

Ariccandira-purāṇam (1524 A.D.) is the famous story of Harichandra, the king who sold his all to keep his word. It is based on the Sanskrit *Harichandra Carida* and the Tamil *Ariccandira-veṇbā*. Like most of the epics of the time it was patronised by the temple. The work never goes below the level of competency, but in the Canto where Sandiramadi loses her son genuine and deep pathos is sounded. Sandiramadi's wail over the dead child is the most exquisite one of its kind and lends itself admirably to singing. We shall examine but one stanza:

'paṉiyāl naṉaindu veyilāl ularndu pasiyāl alaindum
ulavā

[1] Sadāsiva Paṇḍārattār, *A History of Tamil Literature* (13th, 14th and 15th centuries), p. 83.

aṉiyā yaveṅgaṇ aravāl iṟanda *adi-pā vameṉgol* aṟiyēṉ!
taṉiyē kiḍandu *viḍa*nōy seṟindu *tarai*mī duruṇḍa mahaṉē!
iṉiyā rainambi uyirvāḷ vamendaṉ iṟaiyō ṉumyāṉum *avamē*!'

The five Sanskrit words in the above stanza have been so naturalised that the Tamil loses none of its mellow sweetness. And now for the meaning of the stanza: 'Soaked in the dew, dried in the Sun, wandering with hunger, you would not die. That you should so die by the cruel, fierce-eyed snake, what is my great sin? I know not. Son, who, lying all alone and burning with poison, has rolled on the ground! Now on whom shall we depend, my king and I, helpless as we are?'

The poem was composed by Vīrakavirāsar, a goldsmith of Nallūr in Pāṇḍimaṇḍalam.

Naiḍadam by Adivīrarāma Pāṇḍiyaṉ of the second half of the sixteenth century, is the story of Naḷa, the story that Puhaḷēndi has narrated. The poem is pretty well-known, but maybe that is because the author was a scion of the once flourishing race of Pāṇḍya kings. It is not necessary here to pull the poem to bits or examine its defects because there are no real merits worth mentioning. *Naiḍadam* is almost unreadable. But the royal author must be remembered for endeavouring to protect the flickering lights of Tamil literature in that dark and stormy age, and for contributing his mite, though it is a very poor little mite, to its impoverished funds. His translations from the Sanskrit are not worthy of serious consideration.[1] But his *Vēṟṟi-vēṟkai* is a valuable addition to the body of ethical works in Tamil.

[1] *Kāsi-k-kāṇḍam* and *Kūrma-purāṇam*.

Tiru-viḷaiyāḍal-purāṇam of Parañcōdi Muṉivar belongs probably to the beginning of the seventeenth century. It is an account of the divine sport of Śiva at Madura. It is an ambitious poem based on the Sanskrit *Hālāsya Mahātmya* of *Skanda-purāṇa*. It is definitely an improvement on the two previous Tamil works on the same theme. Its structure is loose, but occasionally there are very beautiful hits, as in the story of Śiva carrying earth for the sake of a poor old woman, and its diction also is sweet. The artistic model of the poem would appear to be *Periya-purāṇam* which we have considered in the previous age, and this *Tiru-viḷaiyāḍal-purāṇam* is not an unworthy successor. Its style is almost like Kambaṉ's, but then the human interest is weak.

Kanda-purāṇam of Kacciyappa Sivāccāriyār of Kāñchi (1625) is based on the Sanskrit *Skanda-purāṇa*. It deals with the story of how the gods were released from captivity by Subramaṇya by killing Sūrapadma. That the work is an imitation of *Kamba-rāmāyaṇam* is more than obvious. Unfortunately, no one other than a Śaivite with conventional ideas would be able to make much out of the work. As poetry it is not a success though it is an ambitious work running to more than ten thousand stanzas. It could hardly be included in the literature of power in which Tamil is so rich.

On the whole the *purāṇas* of this age do not have much to recommend them as literary works. With the exception of a few Jain works and the Naḷa and Harichandra stories they are nothing but Hindu religious stories claiming, as the fashion was, to have been taken from the Sanskrit. The language in which they are couched is hardly natural Tamil, and in general they are not remarkable for sensitiveness to beauty, sincerity, or depth of experience. This takes away from us the necessity to

review each of them independently, and that is rather a relief, for they are a vastly numerous array indeed. Along with these *purāṇas* we may bundle up the countless *prabandhas* of this age, such as the *ulās*, *andādis*, *kalambahams*, *vaṇṇams* etc. Except for the change in verse-forms, they are nearly all of the same mediocre quality.

5. Some Literary Personalities

Here, however, we have to mention a few names of men who, though they were not great poets, were yet outstanding literary personalities of the time. One personality is Poyyāmoḻi (1268-1311), a Tamil enthusiast, who is said to have revived the Sangam in Madura. Iraṭṭaiyar (1321-39) or the Twin-poets are an interesting pair. One of them was blind and the other lame, and the blind man carried the lame man on his shoulders as they went. These companions in sorrow, as they complemented each other in life, did so in poetry also, one man completing extempore what the other began. Their works may not be much after all, but their singular relationship would preserve their memory.

Aruṇahiri is known to every Śaivite family in Tamilnad. He was born in Tiruvaṇṇāmalai and it is said that morally he was a reformed wreck. His poetry is heavily packed with Sanskrit words. And it also shows a revelling in the erotic element first and then a religious reaction against it. As religion and as poetry his verses are not much, but their lilt is a thing which cannot be captured by another poet. Words, marshalled with rhymes and alliterations interpersed, break from him in a deluge. Aruṇahiri is famous for *sandam* or rhythmic pattern, and he seems to have exhausted all its variations. We give here two specimen lines to illustrate his *sandam:*

'pādi madinadi pōdu vaṇisaḍai nādaṉ aruḷiya kumarēsā!
pāhu kaṉimoḷi mādu kuṟamahaḷ pādam varuḍiya
maṇavāḷā!'

This is the *sandam* or rhythmic pattern:

tā′ṉa táṉatáṉa tā′ṉa táṉatáṉa tā′ṉa táṉatáṉa táṉatā′nā′.

It is this feature of his verse that accounts for its popularity. His main work is *Tiru-p-puhaḷ*, of this stamp. Yet, when set to music, the effect is wonderful, because of its rhythm. It is in praise of Muruha. His other works are mere word-jugglery for the lover of literature.

Aruṇahiri seems to have lived in the first half of the fifteenth century.[1]

Among the Vaishṇavite poets, on conventional lines, of the time, Piḷḷai-p-perumāḷ Aiyaṅgār (1636-50) alone deserves special mention. His works have been collected in the *Ashṭa-prabandham*. There is some individuality, and at times a glow of beauty, in them. He seems to be a contemporary of Kumara-kuru-parar.

Kumara-kuru-parar, a scholar and vastly prolific writer, was a powerful influence from the *mutts*. He is the author of sixteen works of which none can be said to have surpassing excellence, though there is a decided dignity about his style, and *Mīṉaṭci-ammai Piḷḷai-t-tamiḻ* and *Muttu-k-kumārasāmi Piḷḷai-t-tamiḻ* at least can be said to display genuine poetic merit. Kumara-kuru-parar went to Benares, and established there a *mutt*.

Siva-p-pirahāsar, also from the *mutts*, was an even more prolific writer, of much the same type. He was also involved in heated religious controversies. He was an astoundingly clever versifier, and his enormous conceits have won for him the name 'karpaṉai-k-kaḷañciyam'

[1] Sadāsiva Paṇḍārattār, *A History of Tamil Literature* (13th, 14th and 15th centuries), p. 98.

or 'treasury of imagination'. He was a Vīra-śaivite and has translated *Prabhuliṅga-līla*, a Vīra-śaivite work from Kaṉṉaḍa.

6. Philosophical Works

Quite a number of philosophical works belong to this period. The impact of the Aryan religions and Sanskrit thought had caused the Tamil mind to speculate in the religious field and formulate its own theories. The outcome was Śaiva-siddhānta, the beginnings of which are to be found even earlier. It professes to study the relationship between *padi* or God, *pasu* or the soul, and *pāsam* or bondage. The greatest theological work[1] of the period is Meykaṇḍār's *Śivañaṉa-bōdam*, revealing the essence of the philosophy in twelve short *sūtras*, later elaborated in works like *Śivañāṉa-sittiyār* and commentaries[2] on them. It is said to be a translation from the Sanskrit *Rouravāgama*, but some claim that the said passage is a translation from the Tamil *Śivañāṉa-bōdam* since it contains a reference to the *Śivañāṉa-bōda*, and no work of the name is known to have existed then in Sanskrit. Some of the theories of *Śivañāṉa-bōdam* are simple observations which no one would deny. The entire world of human experience consists of sentient and non-sentient beings, of which the sentient are divided into masculine, feminine and neuter elements. It goes through creation, progress and destruction. Things of the earth return to the earth. Similarly the earth returns to where it belongs, the ultimate Power. From such observations the philosophy proceeds to assume that this ultimate Power has the benevolent function of trying

[1] There are fourteen Śaiva-siddhānta *sāstras*.

[2] By Siva-p-pirahāsar of Madura (1489), Sivakkoḻundu Dēsihar (1564), Niramba Aḻahiya Dēsihar, etc.

to eliminate self from living things; that devotion to Him is the ultimate wisdom; that this love will finally lead us to God through His grace. Unfortunately, as in many branches of Hindu theology, the emphasis is not on love to mankind, while non-religious Tamil philosophy has always placed its chief emphasis on this idea. Also, for all that Śaiva-siddhānta claims to be purely indigenous, in its present form of practice it does not affect the polytheistic traditional Hinduism as nurtured by the Brahmins.

Strange to say, the two other schools of religious thought that hailed, if not from Tamil, from the Tamil country, Advaita and Visishṭādvaita, have not made any change either in the religious practices of the times, and it would seem that Hindu philosophy as such has had no relation to the deepest religious faith or even the customary religious observances of the people, though it provides food for reflection to the intellectually inclined, almost invariably from the privileged classes. It is also noteworthy that the fundamental dogmas of traditional Hinduism that are known to every so-called Hindu are not Śaiva-siddhānta, Visishṭādvaita, Advaita or the thought in the Vēdas, but just belief in *karma* and observance of temple rites or *pūja* to one's deity. Yet Hindu dogma affirms that a complete intellectual understanding of God is not merely possible but is equal to a union with Him. But it is time to leave philosophy and come to the commentaries.

7. Commentaries

Whatever the commentaries might be in themselves as literature, their authors were justified in their attempts to preserve their heritage from ruin. Had it not been for their zeal, many of the ancient works would by now

have been irretrievably lost. Even of the available works, we would have found it impossible to go through many of them without the help of these commentators.

Among the commentaries Mayilainādar's on *Naṉṉūl* and Perundēvaṉār's on *Vīrasōḻiyam* may be mentioned first.

Aḍiyārkkunallār's commentary on *Silappadihāram* is by any standard more than competent. He has poetic sense and he gives us a good deal of information about the techniques of music and dancing before his day. Besides, his commentary is a valuable source-book of our knowledge of many works now lost. But Parimēlaḻahar's commentary on *Tiru-k-kuṟaḷ* has the honour of being the best, not merely of the commentaries on the *Kuṟaḷ* but also of all available Tamil commentaries. He is said to be a Brahmin of Kāñchi (1272), but it refreshes to find that his style is in singularly clear and chaste Tamil for the times. He is also unbiased, and though perhaps a few ideas from Sanskrit sources might have influenced his thinking, in general he has been able to make out the thought of the Tamil seer with sure insight. Tiruvaḻḻuvar is fortunate in finding a commentator with such a keen perception of word-values and beauty of thought and powers of clear argument. Parimēlaḻahar has also commented on *Paripāḍal.* Of the other commentaries on the *Kuṟaḷ*, Maṇakkuḍavar's is worth reading.

Nacciṉārkkiṉiyar of the fourteenth century is the last great commentator, and his commentaries on *Tol-kāppiyam*, *Pattu-p-pāṭṭu*, *Kali-t-tohai* and *Sīvaha-sindā-maṇi* are used to this day, though he is prone to looking for his own ideas in the verses. Yet he does have a keen poetic sense and awareness of word values. Earlier commentators on *Tol-kāppiyam* are Teyva-c-cilaiyār, Pērāsiriyar and

Sēṉāvaraiyar (1275), the last of whom is resolved to exhibit his Sanskrit knowledge.

Miscellaneous commentaries on *Puṟa-nāṉūṟu*, *Aiṅguṟu-nūṟu*, *Padiṟṟu-p-pattu*, *Aha-nāṉūṟu* etc., have been written, and the bits of them that are available have been found to be immensely useful. The commentaries of this period are a literature in themselves, and they cover a good milestone in the progress of Tamil prose. Our only excuse for not looking at them in more detail is that they would not find a high place in the literature of power in Tamil. Under the conditions we are not able to glance at the body of commentaries in *maṇipravāḷa* of this time, on *Nālāyira-divya-prabandham*[1]. Nor are we concerned with the Jain prose work *Srī-purāṇam* in *maṇipravāḷa*, or lexicons[2] or grammars[3].

In the main, the most conspicuous development in this period is the comparative absence of greatness in the literature of high class society. In the old order great patrons had befriended great authors to the benefit of either side. In the present order, when the Tamils were no longer a free people, the generosity of the rulers naturally went, not to the people and their language, as much as to the study of Sanskrit and the establishment of Aryan philosophy and Aryan ideas both religious and social, under the name of Hinduism. This trend was one that affected the whole of India, but it is a fact that while this laid the foundation of many other Indian languages like Malayāḷam, it really struck at the roots of the vitality of the Tamil language, and succeeded to a

[1] By Periya-āccāṉ Piḷḷai, Vaḍakku-t-tiruvīdi-p-piḷḷai etc.

[2] *Sūḍāmaṇi Nihaṇḍu* (early 16th century), *Kayādaram* (1550), *Aharādi Nihaṇḍu* (1594) and *Uri-c-col Nihaṇḍu* (early 17th century).

[3] *Cidambara-p-pāṭṭiyal* (1508), *Navanīda-p-pāṭṭiyal*, *Kaḷaviyal-kārihai*, *Māṟaṉ Alaṅgāram* (1575) etc.

great extent at the higher levels of society. Who cares today really to read the sort of Sanskrit-crammed, *purāṇa*-ridden, stilted stuff that many of the scholars of the day wrote in the name of Tamil?

However, Tamil was not to be killed off so easily as that. The consciousness of their great tradition was not dead in the minds of the people. At lower levels the language still ran rich and strong, though we observe that the great bards of the age are practically beggars. We might here mention the host of poor poets, religious and non-religious, recognised by the people indeed, but unknown to high life, where Sanskrit had by now put up its flag. As Avvai bitterly remarked, if you are to be acknowledged as a poet in high society, you must have gold rings on your fingers and silk or fine cloth round your loins, besides a few big men to speak highly of you.

8. Sittar Poets

The **sittar** school of sages is of primary importance to Tamil society as the founders of *sitta-vaittiyam* or the system of native Tamil medicine. Whether the system has its roots in Āyurvēda or the Aryan system of medicine, we are not in a position to discuss, but the Tamils claim it as their very own, as much as they claim Śaiva-siddhānta philosophy. But it is beyond question that the *sittars*, the recluses who spent their lives among the herbs of the wild, and meditated on God and man, had developed a system of medicine, that, to judge from its effects, is no mere quackery. The Tamils believe that the system is the result of divine intuition and we know that many of the *sittars* were powerful and original thinkers. But we are here concerned with the poetry of the *sittars*. And the *sittars* here studied are not known to be among the physicians—except for Ahattiyar.

Not all the *sittars* belong to this period. Tirumūlar and Siva-vākkiyar would go to the *bhakti* period. Tāyumāṉavar decidedly comes later, and maybe many of the physician-poets also. But since the majority of them appear to be of this age, we have considered the movement itself here. The language of the *sittars* does not argue an earlier date, and besides, the common trend, that of protest against the abuses of temple-rule, could more conceivably have started some time after its establishment than when it was laying its foundation in the flush of its first ardour.

The *sittars* were, on the whole, a fascinating body of revolutionaries who refused to allow themselves to be carried away by the spirit of the religion of the times. All of them were Śaivites, but their Śaivism is different from the popular Śaivism of the *bhakti* period. They cling steadfastly, not to the images in the temples, but, in the main, to the idea that Śivam or God is the Ancient, the Omnipotent One, and that man's sins stand between his soul and its union with its Maker. This is the gist of the philosophy of the *sittars*.

Idol-worship had been at least known in Tamilnad even in the Sangam times. But except for one or two of their exponents, who identify their ideas of God with an image of a particular temple in passages suspected to be interpolations, the *sittars* in general are vociferous in their expression of the uselessness of idols. 'Shall the gods be stones?'[1] says Śiva-vākkiyar. Paṭṭiṉattār says, 'I cannot exalt the polished stone or the moulded lime or the burnished brass; it is true that within my heart I have set His two bright feet like gold'.[2] 'Oh when',

[1] *Sittar Ñāṉa-k-kōvai* (Vēṇugōpāla Piḷḷai edit. 1947), *Siva-vākkiyar Pāḍal*, 130.

[2] Ibid, *Paṭṭiṉattār Pāḍal*, XI, 61.

wails Pattirahiriyār in his *Lamentations*, 'shall the polished stone, and the moulded lime, and the burnished brass become real to me?'[1] The mind is the temple of God. And how does God get into the mind? Why, says Śiva-vākkiyar, as the cocoanut water gets into the cocoanut,[2] in a mysterious way.

Equally unconservative is the *sittars*' reaction to casteism. By their time the Brahmins, and in their wake, it must be said, other privileged classes also, had fully established their powerful domination over their under-privileged brethren. But protests came spurting from one quarter and another. Avvai herself had remarked on the existence of only two castes among men, the generous and the ungenerous.[3] And the *sittars* with one voice lash with might and main at casteism. 'O, when will come the day', cries Pattirahiriyār, 'that we shall live without caste partitions?'[4] 'What is caste?'[5] asks Śiva-vākkiyar. Incidentally the Brahmins come in for some rough handling. Their Pharisaic insistence on external purity and observance of rites is the target.

'Then and now, O priests, you ate no fish.
Are there not fish in the water where you bathe and drink?
Then and now, O priests, you ate no venison.
Is not the thread on your bosom made of deerskin?'[6]

'Then and now, O priests, you ate no mutton.
Do you not perform your *yāgas* with sheep's flesh?'[7]

Bathing and wearing the sacred ashes are no cure for sin in the eye of the *sittars*.

[1] *Sittar-Ñāṉa-k-kōvai, Pattirahiriyār Pulambal*, 17.
[2] Ibid, *Siva-vākkiyar Pāḍal*, 33. [3] *Nalvaḻi*, 2.
[4] *Sittar Ñāṉa-k-kōvai* (Vēṇugōpāl Piḷḷai edit. 1947), *Pattirahiriyār Pulambal*, 126. [5] Ibid, *Siva-vākkiyar Pāḍal*, 47.
[6] Ibid, 159. [7] Ibid, 158.

Another remarkable feature of the poetry of the *sittars* is the emphasis on character. To escape from the lust of the world, the lust of gold, the lust of woman, is the cry. Anger is a predominant sin. Haughtiness and ego are terrible sins. 'If the mind is well, your prayers are well'[1] says Ahattiyar. Character had not been a special feature of the interest that the *bhakti* poets found in religion. Their emphasis was on *bhakti* or passionate devotion to the god of one's choice, and in their eyes *bhakti* more or less sufficed. But in the poetry of the *sittars* the greatest emphasis is laid on the purity of character, and while the *bhakti* element is not discarded, it is directed in general to no limited idea of the Infinite, but to the God without limitation, to Whom they have applied, by force of custom, the name Śiva. That is perfectly natural, considering their general attitude to the worship of images.

So then the *sittars* were a remarkable group of free-thinkers. It is evident that they commanded great respect among the people by the force of their personalities and their ideas. Yet the hold of the traditional religion on the people, sponsored as it was by the authorities, was now far too strong to be broken by the *sittars*, and particularly so because the *sittars* were not able to put within easy reach of the people a satisfying substitute. In the first place the ideal of God-realisation held out by most of the *sittars*, through the control of the senses known as *yōga*, is obviously not for every man, and the multitudes stay shut out. Besides, it results in a hatred and distrust of womankind, an aspect of religion quite new to the Tamilian mentality. The *bhakti* poets had already dragged woman down from her pedestal of *Silappadihāram* times, but they had only learned to look

[1] *Sittar Ñāṉa-k-kōvai, Ahastiyar Ñāṉam*, II, 1.

on woman as other than an object of reverence. The *sittars*, with their emphasis on the control of the senses, look on woman as the foul temptress, the horrible snare, in life. Whether Tamilian society accepted the *sittars* entirely or not, it must be remembered that ideas like these could not but be leavening it, and the result was that the degradation of woman in Tamil society was really far worse now than that directed by Aryan culture, and Tamilian society fiercely held woman down in a bondage undreamed of in Sangam times.

Not all the *sittars* are great literary figures. Except for the second Paṭṭiṉāttār, and Tāyumāṉavar, the others are humble folk who generally use the simplest spoken language, and are not bothered about the finish of their work. Indeed, poetry is not their prime concern, and one wonders if their poetry is not the more telling on that account. Their superb indifference to, or ignorance of, the complicated poetics brought down from the Sanskrit, gives their expression a sturdy robustness though not an attempt at refinement. They are not free, however, from obscurity in the expounding of their own philosophy, and that probably has earned them a big reputation for mysticism, though a few of them are genuine mystics. Indeed, it has even been suggested that many of these mystical or obscure passages are mischievous interpolations intended to confound their influence.[1]

We might as well make the acquaintance of a few of the more prominent *sittar* poets here. Śiva-vākkiyar is a simple and forceful though crude writer, and some of the sentiments he expresses are quite startling:

'What are temples? What are bathing pools?
Fools who worship temples and bathing pools!

[1] Gover, *Folk-Songs of South India* (1959), p. 169.

Temples are in the mind; and bathing pools are in the mind'.[1]

'You say that Śiva is in bricks and resin and copper. If you could learn to know yourselves first, the god that fills the temple will dance and sing in you'.[2] He even boldly refutes the theory of transmigration that is pronounced in Tamilnad even from Jain times:

'Milk does not return to the udder, nor butter to the butter-milk;
Nor the life within the sea-shell, if it breaks, to its body;
The blown flower, the fallen fruit, do not return to the tree;
The dead are not born, never, never, never!'[3]

Like all the *sittars* he pities the mortals lost in lust, who believe that their earthly possessions are eternal. He laughs at those who bathe for cleanliness' sake and yet are unclean at heart[4]. One is reminded here of Christ's condemnation of the Pharisees. He sternly rejects caste.[5] He says, 'The dogs who call themselves sages are million million.'[6] He laughs at the local custom, of sacrificing to the devil, and asks if it is not the devil of a human being who knows 'the account' of the sacrifice[7]. Saliva, considered terribly unclean, he refuses to consider unclean in itself. 'Why,' he says, 'honey is the bee's saliva; the beetle's saliva is on the flower, the cow's milk itself is mixed with the saliva of the calf! Why should there be so much fuss over it?'[8]

[1] *Sittar Ñāṉa-k-kōvai* (Vēṇugōpāla Piḷḷai edit. 1947), *Siva-vākkiyar Pāḍal*, 35.
[2] Ibid, 36. [3] Ibid, 48. [4] Ibid, 214. [5] Ibid, 47, 216 etc. [6] Ibid, 338. [7] Ibid, 253. [8] Ibid, 496.

9. Paṭṭiṉattār and Other Sittars

With Paṭṭiṉattār we come to one of the two greatest literary personalities of the *sittar* movement. Paṭṭiṉattār's thoughts run in much the same strain as the other *sittars*, but he is a very powerful writer, a spitfire, whether he speaks of beauty or ugliness. Woman's beauty is to him the most detestable thing on earth, and he fairly makes one's gorge rise at his description of it[1]. Hardly is Swift ever so foul-mouthed as Paṭṭiṉattār as he mercilessly rends the veil of glamour away from woman and exposes her as the seat of filth and ugliness. Paṭṭiṉattār's language is unwaveringly direct and cruelly fierce in his treatment of man's sex-inclinations, and never was realist so vivid and at the same time so absolutely free from the taint of eroticism. Nor is it less strong in its picture of man's own physical self: 'This stinking body; this stall of lust; this torn bag, covered with meat; this leather receptacle for rice; this mortal vessel, stuffed with air'.[2] And how about its moral and spiritual qualities? 'The treasury of haughtiness; the granary of anger; the palace from which ego never moves; this home of falsehood; this Castle of lust, with a towering fortress; this rag of a body; how, worshipping you, shall I attain wisdom?'[3] Every expression comes down like a hammer on the nail, driving it home. Indeed, few men worth their salt ever looked for their expression to be helped out by poetic ornament, and Paṭṭiṉattār is proof of that. This is how Paṭṭiṉattār pictures the tragedy of life:

'Having lied your tongues out and earned wealth,
You unite with women who know no good,

[1] *Sittar Ñāṉa-k-kōvai* (Vēṇugōpāla Piḷḷai edit. 1947), *Paṭṭiṉattār Pāḍal*, I, 1.

[2] Ibid, II, 27.

[3] Ibid, xi, 55.

And bring forth children rapidly, readily,
Like the poor white ants that come out from the cleft earth.
You do not know to protect them, nor will you forsake them;
You have put your foot into a hole in the bole of a tree;
Like the monkey that removed the sawyer's wedge,
You are caught to suffer, you are caught, you!'[1]

One of his poems is a pathetic lament: 'I know not the beginning; I know not the end. . . . The earth has devoured me who desired the earth. . . . Fear and conceit refused to subside!'[2] At the root of the poem is a passionate desire to see Śiva, and every stanza ends with a wail.

For Paṭṭiṉattār one of the greatest sins is not to share one's food with the hungry. As for himself, what does he need after all? As he says, with incomparable cynicism, 'For the cold there are rags; for you to beg for and eat every day, there is rice in every home; when you feel like it, there are women for sale in the street; why then do you grow weary in this world, O mind, to be so sore every day?'[3] Probably begging was an every day experience in the life of the *sittars*, for in another touching stanza, that is not cynical, he says, 'To wear, to cover with in the cold wind, when the sun is gone, there is an old garment; all the world over, here and there, is a verandah to sleep on; when one is hungry, there is Śiva to give: My soul, there is nothing that is wanting for you'.[4] We can here just glance at two of Paṭṭiṉattār's most powerful stanzas before we proceed further. This is on the body, the right to which is disputed after death by rival claimants: 'The fire says, "It's mine"; as for the worm, it says, "It's

[1] *Paṭ. Pāḍal*, 65. [2] Ibid, xv, 1, 5, 13. [3] Ibid, xi, 15. [4] Ibid, 17.

mine"; this earth, it says, "Yes, it's mine"; as for the kite, the kite says, "It's mine"; for it to devour, the fox says, "It's mine"; the unhallowed dog says, "It's mine"; then, this stinking body, what do I obtain by cherishing so dearly?"[1] The cumulative effect of these repetitions is not in English what it is in Tamil, in its short forcible monosyllables that take up so little room.

The following stanza is the most often quoted from Paṭṭiṉattār and in the original is most beautiful in its sweet simplicity and its passionate conviction:

> 'oṉṟeṉṟiru; teyvam uṇḍeṉṟiru; uyar selvamellām
> aṉṟeṉṟiru; pasittōr muhambār; nallaṟamum naṭpum
> naṉṟeṉṟiru; naḍunīṅgāmalē namakkiṭṭapaḍi
> eṉṟeṉṟiru; maṉamē uṉakkē upadēsamidē'.[2]

And this is the meaning: 'Take it that He is One; take it that He is; that all wealth, it is not; look at the faces of the hungry; believe that the righteous way and friendliness are good; without moving from your righteous stand, take as yours that which is measured to you: my soul, this is my advice to you'.

These are words which might make a Christian, who knows these only as Christian ideals, stare. True, Paṭṭiṉattār does mention the temple deity. He accepts the *sittar* theory that through *yōga* you can see God, though it is not much emphasised; and he makes a vehement tirade against womanhood. Yet, in his earnestness, in his vision of life's values, in the force of his expression, Paṭṭiṉattār does remind one of the Hebrew prophets who lived before Christ, and prepared the way for Him.

Pattirahiriyār, the disciple of Paṭṭiṉattār, in his *Lamentations*, shows an overpowering consciousness of spiritual frustration, and a longing, a passionate longing for peace,

[1] *Paṭṭiṉattār Pāḍal*, XI, 26. [2] Ibid, 20.

for the realisation of God, for deliverance from sins, for a classless society, for death itself, if it will lead him from illusion to God. The tone of the poem is one of high-pitched wailing, and its title is perfectly justified. One of the wishes he expresses is to be able to regard other lives as being as precious as one's own life.[1] Another is to be lost in meditation and 'give up the Vēdas and the scriptures'.[2] Yet another is 'to suppress the thorn of haughtiness, and burn the five senses'.[3] He is a kind of Jeremiah in Tamil, and his *Lamentations* do not have their like in Indian literature.

Another is Pāmbāṭṭi-c-cittar or Snake Charmer Sittar, the man who has written the famous *Snake-charmer Song* beginning, 'teḷindu teḷindu teḷindāḍu pāmbē!', and that beginning, 'nādar muḍi mēlirukkum nalla pāmbē!' He is a real mystic, who reads a deep interpretation into the mythological conception of the snake owned by Śiva.

Another is Aḻukaṇi-c-cittar or the Weeping Sittar whose poem is a wail of lamentation: 'Born from the city of the womb into the city of ruin, I know not the way to go to the city of truth. . . . I am a fearless thief! I am a friendless sinner! I am a loveless criminal known to say deliberate lies! I am an opium addict! . . . I go to the small ones and extend my palm for charity and show my teeth very much and stare in despair!'

Iḍai-k-kāṭṭu-c-cittar is the author of the popular song 'āṉandakkōṉārē!' and a hymn which is startlingly modern in tone. 'If you think of God as Love, will not bright heaven be yours?' He speaks of God's grace, of God the love of Whom shall drive away sin, of God Whose feet are the divine spirit, of God Whose feet cannot be seen by the eyes, but must be worshipped by the 'inner sense'.

[1] *Pattirahiriyār Pulambal*, 15. [2] Ibid, 156. [3] Ibid, 2.

10. The People's Poets

Next to the *sittar* poets, another force helped to keep alive the great tradition. It was not the verbal gymnasts, or the masters of prosody who poured out flood after flood of verse at short notice. Of these, we also have our stock, big enough to be impressive, though we quietly relegate them to the background. For the Tamils cherish the memory, not of these, as much as of those isolated wandering bards, who with simplicity and sincerity have touched on some of the tenderest chords in life. Many of these poets could not even have been recognized by the Sanskrit standards and several were downright beggars. Avvai had said, 'When hunger comes, then everything else takes wing'.[1] Hunger had come to the people, yet poetry had not abandoned them, though it lingered with more and more fondness over pictures of poverty. Perhaps few languages have as much of beggar-poetry as Tamil. Hardly any one in Tamilnad is ignorant of the whimsically pathetic piece beginning, 'kallaittāṉ maṇṇaittāṉ kāyccittāṉ kuḍikkattāṉ kaṟpittāṉā?'[2] It means, 'Did He teach me to cook the stone or the mud and eat it?' Another, equally well-known, begins, 'pallelām teriyakkāṭṭi-p-paruvaral muhattil kūṭṭi'[3] or, 'Showing all my teeth, and bringing all my pain into my face'.

A humble poet, called Sattimuṟṟa-p-pulavar, has left a very beautiful poem supposed to be addressed by a wandering bard to a stork. It not only shows the sorrows of the Tamil bard of the time, but it is exquisite poetry, with the delicate aroma of Sangam literature on it, and as a sheer picture of poverty excelled only by Peruñcittiraṉār's words[4] to Kumaṇaṉ. Though we cannot

[1] *Nalvāḻi*, 26. [2] *Taṉi-c-ceyyuṭcindāmaṇi* (1908), p. 218.
[3] *Kusēlōpākkiyāṉam*, I, 66. [4] *Puṟa-nāṉūṟu*, 164.

translate the diction, we shall render into English the idea of this poem, which is found today in most anthologies of miscellaneous Tamil verses.

'Stork! Stork! Red-legged stork!
Red-legged stork with the coral beak that tapers
Like the cleft root of the fruitful palmyrah tree!
When you and your wife have bathed at the southern Cape,
If you should return to the North,
Stop at the home of Sattimuṟṟam at our village,
And tell my wife, who must be intently watching
The clicking lizard on the rain-wet wall,
That in the city of our king Māṟaṉ,
Without a garment, and shivering from the cold,
Covering my body with my hands,
Embracing my bosom with my legs,
And sighing like a snake within a case,
Me, you have seen here'.[1]

Kabilar Ahaval[2] is a very interesting popular poem. Most of it is beautiful, in the simplest and plainest language, a protest of the ordinary man against casteism, and an exhortation to be righteous in life since life itself is so short and unstable. The author, whoever he is, echoes the Tamil mind when he asks:

'Will the rain avoid a few men as it falls?
Will the great Earth refuse to bear them?'

But the latter part of the poem is very perplexing. It gives out the author to be the brother of Tiru-vaḷḷuvar and the son of Ādi, a Pulaya woman and Pahavaṉ, a Brahmin. It might be one of the interpolations that have too often found their way into the finest and noblest

[1] *Tamiḻ Nāvalar Saridai* (Kaḻaham edit. 1949), 24.
[2] Gover, *Folk-Songs of South India* (1959), pp. 163-5.

of Tamil poetry, or, what seems more probable, it might simply be an imaginative assumption on the part of the unknown author, to prove the equality of all castes.

Kāḷamēham, living in the middle of the fifteenth century,[1] is a personality of a different stamp. He is a poet of considerable force and talent and he seems to be inordinately proud of his talents. 'If I am silent, I am silent; but if I should arise, child, here is the mighty cloud, the Kāḷamēham!'[2] He is master of many a species of word jugglery and seems to have been especially quick in turning out verses. He is coarse-grained, sharp to see defects, and blunt in speech, with the result that some of his poems are coarse and hardly any can be called beautiful. Still, many of his poems are absorbingly interesting, and they show a new aspect of the Tamil language. So far it had been used mostly for singing and flattery, but Kāḷamēham showed that it could bite as well. He is the only Tamil writer of the past who can claim the name of satirist.

One of his stanzas, on a dairy maid who had given him watery butter-milk, is here quoted: 'When you are in the sky, you are called a cloud; when you are come to the earth, you are called water; when you come to the hand of the soft-bosomed dairy maid, you are called butter-milk! Three names have you obtained!'[3]

His treatment of the traditional religion is very quaint, and like much that he has left, laughter-provoking. 'His limbs are rheumatic; his brother-in-law is diabetic; his son is swollen-bellied; listen, he of Vēḷūr does not know to cure his own troubles. What trouble is he then going to cure?'[4] Among the above references we recog-

[1] Sadāsiva Paṇḍārattār, *A History of Tamil Literature* (13th, 14th and 15th centuries), p. 109.

[2] *Taṉippāḍal Tiraṭṭu* (1902), I, p. 10. [3] Ibid, p. 96. [4] Ibid, p. 59

nize allusions to the fixed posture of Śiva with one leg lifted, and the pot-belly of Gaṇapati. Nor is he more delicate in his handling of other *purāṇic* stories. He has left some poems in the traditional strain, but he is definitely remembered, not by them, but by his isolated verses in which the only creditor he need acknowledge is himself.

So far, we have noticed the impact of Brahminism, Jainism and Buddhism on Tamil life and literature. Two new forces are now at the gate—Islam and Christianity. They also bring their weight to bear, not merely on the language, but on the life of the people. How, we shall see in the next chapter.

VII. THE PERIOD OF TRANSITION

(1650 A.D. — 1800 A.D.)

1. Background

IN THIS age the Tamil country gradually passes into Muslim hands and subsequently to the English. With the weakening of the Vijayanagar crown we find the Nāyaks, the original representatives of the Vijayanagar emperor, seeking political independence for themselves. This meant the end of the empire, and the Muslim powers Bijapur and Golkonda, that had been for a long time enemies of Vijayanagar, entered the Tamil country and dominated the scene. The Marātha generals of Bijapur also throve in this environment. But the Mohammedans quickly brought the country under them, till the British ultimately took over.

Meanwhile new forces were entering the country. Before the seventeenth century the West had turned its attention eastwards. The zest for discovery and adventure, and also for trade, brought Portugal, then Holland, England, Denmark and France to the shores of India. Though Portugal was the earliest to arrive on the scene, England and France were the most powerful, and it was these two countries, that were not good neighbours at home either, that took part in local dissension readily when political and trading interests clashed, and fought the critical battles for power in the Carnatic, in the eighteenth century. The battles were decided finally in favour of the British, who heralded a new epoch by setting up a stable government. In all this confusion and strife, the people of the country, war-weary and caste-ridden, could not have been of any account, and though ballads preserve the heroic struggles of isolated Tamil

chieftains like Kaṭṭa-p-pommaṉ, in the main what resistance could there have been against the Great God Gun? Anyway the Chēras, the Chōḷas and the Pāṇḍyas were not to return. And the Tamils must have been glad when they were at last able to draw their breath in peace, though not much besides their breath was left to them.

Tamilnad had already known three great religions, Brahminism, Jainism and Buddhism. All these religions had first won the support of the kings, and established themselves mostly on the upper levels of society. Now Islam also, through political power, was to make headway in the country, and before the British entered, there was a considerable Muslim population. Yet another religion had already come in, and this was Christianity. The Portuguese brought it first to Tamilnad, and the people, who regarded the Portuguese way of life with contempt, regarded their religion also with scorn. Yet conversion went on. Reports are that the Portuguese forced the Paravas under their influence to become Catholics, but in any case the outcaste section of the population would not have needed much force to escape from the Brahministic religion, particularly because, in the Nāyak regime, the institution of caste was recognized as sacrosanct by the government itself, so much so that express rules forbade intermarrying between even sub-sections of a caste. Some of the Jesuit priests did admirable work, and as may be expected met with strong opposition and persecution from the Brahmins and other highly privileged castes, even though many of the rulers afforded them general sympathy and protection. The people were taught to fear for the temples and the rulers were given political suspicions. Among the missionaries who endured the worst persecution was Britto, and Britto did far more for the Catholic religion in India than any

one else—except perhaps St. Xavier himself—of whom we have definite knowledge, when in 1693, he was martyred. Conversions spread rapidly and by the beginning of the eighteenth century there was a large Catholic population. The work of the Protestant missionaries also was not insignificant.

2. Muslim Contribution

We have to consider the contribution of the two new religions to Tamil literary life. The Muslims claim our attention first. The mother-tongue of most of the Muslim population in Tamilnad was and is Tamil. Naturally they learned to love the language, and they had their scores of facile and prolific writers who do not concern us here. True, in the midst of their limited number of poets, no giant has made his appearance, but the fact that they have served Tamil with the best they had must be respected. We might here mention the one Muslim personality, who, through his association with literature, has made his memory dear to every Tamil heart. This is Sīdakkādi of whom it is said, 'settum koḍuttāṉ Sīdakkādi' —'Even in death did Sīdakkādi give'. It was not because he merely patronized the poets. The Chēra-chōḷa-pāṇḍyas, and even the Nāyaks did that. The poets must have found more than patronage in the man, to refer to him as they do. References to him by poets, Muslim and non-Muslim, make us think of Pāri and Adihamāṉ of Sangam days. And few more piercing verses have been written in this age than those on Sīdak-kādi's death. The verses examined today are wet with the tears of the bereaved bards, and move us strangely to feel that greatness in human nature is not a fallacy. Sīdakkādi did not write the following verses, but he was their cause, and of many more.

This is by Paḍikkāsi-p-pulavar, a Hindu bard: 'The desired one; Sīdakkādi of Kāyal-tuṟai, of the beautiful Vajra land; he who planted the flag of fame: he made the Tamil poets beggars, and he flung a handful of mud into their hungry mouths, and he has hidden also, having entered the tomb!'[1]

This also is by a Hindu poet Namaccivāya-p-pulavar: 'What if the Lady Prosperity lives? Or, if the Lady Earth lives? Or, if in this beautiful world, the Lady Sarasvati lives? What if we live? When the handsome one, Sīdakkādi, the head of poets, the generous prince died, poetry also died.'[2]

Kāyal-tuṟai, Sīdakkādi's place, has been the centre of Muslim literary activities. It must be remembered that quite as much as Sanskrit is the sacred language of the Brahmins, and Latin of the Catholics, Arabic is the sacred language of the Muslims. Naturally a number of Arabic words get into their Tamil, but the Muslim literature never having been so much popularised as Sanskritised Hindu works, only a few words like 'salām' and 'sabāsh', have been absorbed into standardised Tamil. The Muslims even went so far as to write Tamil in Arabic script, for the simple reason that Tamil does not accommodate all Arabic sounds, and Arabic technical terms and names read better in Arabic script. As for the nature of the poetry, it is predominantly, almost entirely, occupied with the Islamic religion. But if we look for an outstandingly original contribution, we are disappointed. The Muslim poets slip conveniently into the established grooves of Tamil poetry, and in verse-form or even in presentation of thought, they do not differ from the other ones. Indeed, so much are they victimised by tradition that even Muslim thought is often lost, and except

[1] *Taṉippāḍal Tiraṭṭu* (1902), I, p. 244. [2] Ibid, p. 261.

for the presence of a few names we cannot distinguish them from the other Tamil poems. Established verse-forms in Tamil like *ulā*, *andādi*, *ammāṉai*, *kummi* etc., are handled by the Muslim poets, and the few Arabic forms they have tried to introduce, too, do not stand out because of the want of artistic individuality. Perhaps, in popular literature, the *paḍai-p-pōr* or war-ballad has been handled by the Muslim poets with distinction.

Umaṟu-p-pulavar is by far the most well-known of the Muslim poets. Umaṟu's *Sīṟā-p-purāṇam* or the life of the Prophet is an ambitious work running to 5027 *virut-tams*. It is modelled on the Tamil epics, and though it is not complete it is the most popular poem among the Muslims. That its language is sonorous and smooth is also evident. Yet it seems reasonable to assume that, if it had indeed brought out fully the spirit of the Prophet, it would have attracted more attention from the non-Muslim population. Yet it remains the greatest Muslim work in Tamil, and, if that could be any credit, it is far greater a work than the greatest Christian poem in Tamil. Umaṟu was patronised by Sīdakkādi, Eṭṭappa Nāyak and Abdul Kāsim. He belongs to the second half of the seventeenth century. Among other Muslim poets Mastāṉ Sāhib of the next century reminds one of Tāyumāṉavar and is very popular.

3. Christian Contribution

Christian Tamil literature was already afoot in the country in the previous period when Father de Nobili and other Jesuit missionaries were trying to carry their message to the people. Even as early as the sixteenth century, at least two books had gone to print, though the press efforts were not continued for political reasons.

Now we come to Ziegenbalg (1683-1719), a German of the Danish Protestant Mission, who contributed his mite to the growth of prose literature, by writing on religious matters. But it was no mite that he gave, when, in the beginning of the eighteenth century, he popularised the printing press. It takes us some trouble to realise that the golden words of Vaḷḷuvar and the resolution of stormy passions in Kamban's story have been handed down through the generations by a few precious moth-eaten palm-leaves, preserved in temples or *mutts*. The gap between the learned and the illiterate had therefore every chance of growing wider, even without the force of the caste-system. But the printing press came, and it revolutionised society. Just as in England, it took education and theology out of the hands of the priests, and made men of the masses, so also in Tamilnad it helped the common people towards enlightenment. Of course the change was not sudden but it became sure at any rate. The change must definitely have been speeded up by the children's schools which he set up in Tranquebar, thus starting the great educational movement, led by the missionaries, that enlightened all the country. He saw the need of text-books for the children, as well as books for any man who was fortunate enough to know his letters. It is an interesting coincidence, that, just as the *bhakti* movement in India, and the schools of Advaita, Visishṭādvaita and Śaiva-siddhānta, originated in the Tamil country, so also printing and the consequent enlightenment of the masses started in the Tamil area. The first book to be printed in India was in Tamil. Ziegenbalg, who taught the Tamils the value of printing, is the first great name in Christian Tamil literature.

Father Beschi (1680-1746) was a Jesuit from Italy, who has been affectionately recognised by the Tamils as

Vīramāmuṉivar or the Great Valiant Hermit, in generous acknowledgement of his kinship with them in the love of the Tamil language. He had great influence with Chandā Sāhib, and his personality and the pomp with which he was heralded, made him quite a conspicuous figure in his day.

The most popular of his works is his prose narrative *Paramārtta-kuru* which sets the reader roaring with laughter. It is just broad farce about a silly hermit and his disciples, but one feels it is a refreshing addition to Tamil, for, in general, Tamil literature does pull a bit of a long face. It was a quickening stimulus in the field of Tamil prose, into which prose narratives, comics and fiction started pouring in its wake.

But the most ambitious of Father Beschi's poetical works is *Tēmbāvaṇi*, an epic narrative about the life of St. Joseph. It by no means justifies the claim in the preface that it tells only the truth unlike the other Tamil epics, and the mythological element with which it is crammed serves no purpose, unlike the mythology in Kamban. And it is a pity that such pains should be so rewarded, for the poem is almost unreadable. One wonders how Tamil poetry, modelled on Kamban, could manage to be so unimpressive as that. Not all the generous appreciation showered on it by the Tamils can make it a great poem, though it is one of the greatest Christian poems in Tamil up-to-date.

What is the reason for this failure? It is certainly not that Beschi was an Italian and could not have had much command of Tamil idiom. A language which accommodates so different a language as Sanskrit could have comfortably accommodated a little from another foreign language. *Paramārtta-kuru* does not suffer from want of idiom. It is not that the story is a Christian story.

It is not that Father Beschi found it difficult to tackle foreign metres, for it is an interesting fact that no Tamilian, not even Kamban, has handled as many Tamil metres as Beschi. It is that even Kamban cannot make anybody more than half a poet. Beschi has had less poetry to give in *Tēmbāvaṇi* than in his minor poems.[1]

But among Beschi's contributions to Tamil must be mentioned a few prose works[2], mainly on Catholic religious philosophy or theology, the first Tamil dictionary[3] properly so-called, and a grammar[4]. His was a tremendously painstaking and scholarly nature. He might not have brought poetry with him, but the great interest in the Tamil language and literature that he brought was a powerful stimulus, and raised the status of Tamil in the eyes of the local people at least. The extent of his influence may be realised when we find that he has even made certain reforms in the script of the language, such as differentiating short and long forms for 'e' and 'o'. The entire Tamil population has benefited by his work and has not failed to express its appreciation of it.

Unlike Muslim influence, then, which, in the sphere of Tamil literature, barely moved out of Muslim society, and failed to enrich literature sufficiently even for that society as it might have done, with Arabic and Persian tradition, Christian work has influenced all sections of the Tamil people. The missionaries brought the press; they introduced punctuation and space between words and sentences; they printed tracts in prose; they published text-books in Tamil for the young; they stimulated the study of the language, and some of them were devoted students themselves. This good work began even from

[1] *Tiru-k-kāvalūr-k-kalambaham, Aḍaikkala-mālai* etc.
[2] *Vēdiyar-oḻukkam, Vēdaiḻakkam* etc.
[3] *Saduraharādi.* [4] *Toṉṉūl Viḷakkam.*

the sixteenth century though it reached its climax in the nineteenth. The momentousness of all this in that degraded age can be recognized only with some thought, and if the Tamils, non-Christian along with Christian, have always gratefully acknowledged their indebtedness to the missionaries, the acknowledgement is just.

4. Tāyumāṉavar

Meanwhile, popular Tamil tradition also was not quite extinct. The great *sittar* movement that had spread over the previous period, finds its strongest exponent of this period, in Tāyumāṉavar (1706-44), a giant of Tamil religious poetry. For all that he professes to be a Śaivite, the emphasis is, not on *bhakti* to the image of a temple, but on *yōgic* meditation and devotion to the One God, the Author of all men, and on goodness of character in one's relationship with men. With the consciousness of the one infinite God, he is not able to keep his mind steadily on worship before the images or in the temples. With the awareness of the need for ethics, comes the dissatisfaction with one's own character, and, occasionally the painful crying consciousness of sin. Liberation means liberation from one's own sins as well as from birth. In all these ideas Tāyumāṉavar was the direct descendant of the *sittars*, those voices that cried in the wilderness while traditional Hinduism pointed complacently to the images and the temples as all that were needed most in a man's religious life. But Tāyumāṉavar does not quarrel like the *sittars* with the images or the temples. He is inclined to reconcile different religious trends.

Tāyumāṉavar was a passionate seeker after God. He was steward to one of the Nāyaks. After the Nāyak's

death he found himself admired by the Nāyak's widow who wanted to marry him. Joseph fled from Potiphar's house, and the horror of life dawned on him. Perhaps, it was then that the whole energy of his ardent, pure and beautiful nature directed itself towards God.

But what concerns us most is Tāyumāṉavar's poetry. Here is poetry most of which the whole world can follow. His poetry is not like Irāmāliṅga Suvāmihaḷ's, a stream of mellow enchantment. Force is the word for it. His words are hammer-strokes. They generally express a simple belief in *yōgic* meditation, and we are aware of a great spiritual thirst as he calls out to God from the different needs of his human nature. He is in line with perhaps both the Tamil *bhakti* poets and the *sittars*, but the latter element is more pronounced.

When we talk of Tāyumāṉavar's poetry, we mean, of course, his Tamil poetry. For he has also occasionally written in Sanskrit, that is in Tamil script. A stanza like that beginning, 'attuvida vattuvai', for instance, so completely Sanskritised as it is, carries no music in it for Tamil ears, and no meaning for Tamil hearts. We have but to set against this his beautiful stanza beginning, 'āsaikkōr aḷavillai', and then we will know that too much Sanskrit in Tamil literature, religious or otherwise, would be just too much salt in a dish. The fact is that Tāyumāṉavar was a scholar in Sanskrit as in Tamil, and without any prejudices or predilections for any language he wrote as the language came to him, for Tāyumāṉavar was no conscious artist. But, in the main, his poetry is tolerably good Tamil and the interspersed Sanskrit words are generally not irritatingly obtrusive. In his finest verses his Tamil is also at its purest. For himself, Tāyumāṉavar cares little for his scholarship.

What need does such a devotee of God have of the language of poetry? 'Why,' he says, 'while there is many and many a garland, the wise ones have said that You favour the garland of verses; and so with tears I string my words together'[1].

The dread of death is on Tāyumāṉavar as on the *sittars*. 'Where have You hidden?' he cries to God. 'O, I am lost. Have You made me subject to the blind Death who tears fibre from stone, and keeps the sea in a gingelly seed? I do not know'[2]. Occasionally, however, there is a happier note, a note of sweet faith, but never of complacency: 'My soul! Know that the Lord plays with you as with a top. And so, if without anxiety you will rely on His grace, home-life and ascetic life are both good for you'[3]. At one moment, he says that the Śaivite scriptures are unable to show the fullness of God.[4] At another moment he even complains that *yōga* has failed him.[5] He wonders what the godless, loveless ones will do 'when Death looks for them'[6]. His experience, he knows, might not be shared by all; but he does not wonder, for, 'she who bore the children knows the pain; will the childless one know it?'[7] Like Paṭṭiṉattār he has no faith in the answers that philosophical knowledge gives to our queries about God. 'Let me not knock my head against the devil of philosophy'[8], he remarks. 'O when comes the day', cries he, 'when the grace of my Father shall abound and

[1] *Tāyumāṉavar Pāḍal, Paṉmālai*, 1.
[2] Ibid, *Sollaṟkariya*, 1.
[3] Ibid, *Āsaiyeṉum*, 3.
[4] Ibid, 18.
[5] Ibid, *Parāpara-k-kaṇṇihaḷ*, 217.
[6] Ibid, *Pāyappuli*, 56.
[7] Ibid, *Peṟṟavaṭkē*, 1.
[8] Ibid, *Uḍalpoy*, 29.

I shall not be in the grip of knowledge as a frog is in the mouth of a serpent?'[1] He also, like the *sittars*, would detest the body and the pleasure of the senses, but does not indulge in vituperations against woman to the same degree. And so far as his offerings to God are concerned he says, 'My heart is the temple; my thoughts, the incense; my love, the holy water. Come to take my offering, Almighty One!'[2] His *parāpara-k-kaṇṇihaḷ*, beautiful, passionate, red with the life-blood of a great and saintly man, could, with the exception of a very few stanzas, be sung by Christian and Muslim and Hindu alike. If there are chords responsive to religion in a man, these inspired stanzas would touch and awaken them. Tāyumāṉavar is perhaps an unequal poet, but that he has had moments of illuminating vision for which the words find themselves, no one can deny.

5. Mutt Forces

Paḍikkāsu-p-pulavar of this period must be mentioned among the genuine if minor bards in Tamil. He belongs to Umaṟu's time, and is a true poet among the wandering bards of this time. He was a Śaivite from Kaḷandai in Toṇḍaināḍ. He is highly praised for his use of *sandam* or rhythmic pattern, but his real aptitude lies elsewhere. To the traditional verses he imparts a directness and simplicity of language that are very telling, the more telling for the absence of these qualities in kindred poets. We observe that he is the first poet who has left on record the fact that Tamil as a language has been neglected in Tamilnad, for the reason that the Telugus, the Marāthas and the Muslims held sway over the country.[3] It is

[1] *Tāyumāṉavar Paḍāl, Ennāḷ*, 8. [2] Ibid, *Parāpara-k-kaṇṇihaḷ*, 151.
[3] Nārāyaṇaswāmi Mudaliyār, *Paḍikkāsu-p-pulavar Saridam*, p. 35.

evident that Paḍikkāsu met with frequent disappointments in his wanderings all over the country, and that the deplorably sophisticated tastes of the so-called lovers of literature landed him in neglect. At one time, Paḍikkāsu's trophies were even snatched from him by inferior poets who were better adepts, however, in *vaṇṇam* or *sandam*, which was the occasion for the bard's remarking, 'Aiyō! All over the Koṅgu land has my Tamil become poison'. He seems to have been drawn into another unfortunate trend of the times, of poet bandying words with poet, all of course in proper verse-form. Many a verse of his carries deep pathos with it, showing the poet struggling, not merely for material reward, but also for recognition. He has left a few beautiful verses on Sīdakkādi, but he is also able to carry the force of his originality to nearly everything that he touches, as when he reminds Muruha that he is no baby but the husband of two wives and should therefore know his duty to him. Of his works[1] the *Taṇḍalaiyār Sadaham* is the most important. It is no mere collection of ethical sayings. It is enriched and enlivened with his own experiences, with metaphor, simile and proverb. Paḍikkāsu is a poet who will continue to be read with Avvai and Kāḷamēham.

Śivañāṉa Muṉivar (1785) may be said to be the greatest literary personality from the *mutts*. Scholar, grammarian, commentator, and prose-writer, he is also a poet who has tried his hand at forms of *piḷḷai-t-tamiḻ*, *andādi* etc. But, as it is often the case, a versatile genius and poetry do not go closely together. His reputation mainly rests on a great commentary on Śivañāṉa-bōdam. Like many of the *mutt* scholars, he was a Sanskrit scholar, yet upheld the dignity of Tamil tradition and was able to point out

[1] *Toṇḍaimaṇḍala-sadaham*, *Pāmbalaṅgāra-varukka-k-kōvai* etc.

some of the distinctive achievements of Tamil in the face of some of the overbearing Sanskrit enthusiasts[1] who claimed as they do now, that Tamil is dependent on, and inferior to, Sanskrit. He has translated a few Sanskrit works. He was mainly of a logical and argumentative temperament and his prose refutations of tall claims made by others are interesting reading. The trends of the times, with its obsession with religious philosophy, are reflected in him. His most ambitious poetical work, *Kāñci-p-purāṇam*, shows, however, a want of the finer poetic sensibilities and falls flat.

6. Music and Drama

The musical compositions of the period now claim our attention. Music could not have been a new element in Tamil society. *Silappadihāram* speaks of a highly advanced music, the features of which, however, we do not fully recognize in the modern Carnatic music. We must remember that music from the *bhakti* age onwards had passed almost completely into temple control and patronage, and naturally Brahmin influence must have gradually gained the upperhand. As South Indian music stands today, the credit for the best musical compositions goes to Tyāgarāja, a Telugu Brahmin. In Tamil the great hymnologists of the *bhakti* age were themselves musical composers, but in the age we are handling at present we find composers interested far more in the musical than in the literary aspect of composition, in line with the great musical composers of South India. Since we are concerned however more with the literary

[1] Swāminādа Dēsihar, author of *Ilakkaṇa-k-kottu;* Vaittiyanāda Dēsihar, author of *Ilakkaṇa-viḷakkam;* and Subramaṇia Dīkshidar author of *Pirayōha-vivēham.*

aspect, we cannot have much to say for them. Muttu-t-tāṇḍavar and Aruṇāsala-k-avirāyar are among the outstanding few of Tamil composers. Even today *kīrttaṉais* like theirs, beginning, 'kālai-t-tūkki niṉṟāḍum deyvamē', or 'yārō? ivar yārō? eṉṉa pērō? aṟiyēṉē!' claim a very wide popularity. Deprived of their music however they are not much.

Introducing the dramatic element into music are the *kuṟavañci*, the *noṇḍi-nāḍaham* and the *paḷḷu*. The highlights of the story are the songs of the characters, but they are interspersed with poetic links. The first-known, as well as, the best *kuṟavañci*, is *Kuṟṟāla-k-kuṟavañci* by Rājappa Kavirāyar (1718). The background is religion, and the story is that of a high-born lady who, having fallen in love with Śiva taken in procession, finds comfort in the words of a *kuṟava* woman who prophesies that she shall marry the god she loves. The fortune-teller returns home loaded with rewards, but her husband, who looks upon her finery with suspicion, questions her about it. So the element of divine love is set off against a coarser human love, and romance against cheap wit. The *kuṟavañci* does have popular appeal, but *Kuṟṟāla-k-kuṟavañci* is remarkably beautiful in the joyous leaping rhythm and the lovely description of mountain scenery. There is variety, descriptive beauty and musical language in the *Kuṟṟāla-k-kuṟavañci* songs.

Mukkūḍal-paḷḷu is the best known of the *paḷḷus*. The theme of the *paḷḷu* is worked out against a religious background. The wives of a *paḷḷaṉ*, 'a low-caste' man, exchange hot words among themselves, and one being a Vaishṇavite and the other a Śaivite, both Vishṇu and Śiva are dragged into the quarrel in a most unseemly way. The sentiments expressed are coarse, but the language, though simpler than that of the *kuṟavañci*, is still rather high-flown for

the *paḷḷar* class and one certainly does not expect the outcastes of Hindu society to discuss Vaishṇavism and Śaivism. Except for one or two passages about the rains there is no special beauty about the *paḷḷu* worth mentioning. Both the *paḷḷus* and the *kuṟavañcis* seem to have been a popular form of entertainment in Hindu religious festivals and there have been many of them.

7. Ballads

Now a word about the ballads. It is remarkable that, while in English the ballads are more or less the stepping stone to great literature, in Tamil the early ballads we possess mark the reverse process. When the people had lost their freedom and their prosperity, and their creative efforts had no scope at top levels in society, and their language itself stood in danger in sophisticated circles, they still had to let off steam somewhere. Thus we find the beginnings of the ballads even in the decadent age. They were also the preparation for the revival of Tamil poetry soon to come, and maybe the comparative increase of literacy among the masses, caused by the schools, stimulated such a growth of poetry which, while not exactly refined, at least represented the people's love of literature.

The Tamil ballads are like all ballads. Many of them are sentimental, often silly, intended to exploit the softness of human nature, and admirably suited still to grandmothers with plenty of leisure. *Rājā Tēsiṅgu*, the story of the Gingi prince who parted from his bride to die for his friend, is still popular. *Silappadihāram*, by now unreadable to the Tamil population, passes into ballad form as *Kōvalaṉ-kadai*, exchanging Iḷāṅgō's subtle artistic graces for the cheaper technique of the

ballad, thoroughly spoiling thereby even the story. *Purāṇic* stories get into the ballads. Nearly every sphere of life—historical, social and religious—is represented, in these songs of the people, and their crudity is often lost in the charm of their childlike wiles that seek your attention. In the next age, with the spread of education, the ballads are to develop into a luxuriant undergrowth of literature. Along with these ballads we may dismiss the pretty folk-songs of the people, the quaint lullabies, the songs to ease the tedium of such grinding work as drawing water and pounding grain, and their marriage songs and funeral songs.

In this age, then, the age of great changes in Tamil life, we naturally find great changes appearing in literature also. The period is certainly not one of fertile literary productivity. The scholastic, high-flown type of work does go on in the *mutts* and even in Muslim spheres, but in the *mutts* we sense the beginning of the reaction to Sanskrit, with Sanskrit scholars like Śivañāṉa Muṉivar recognizing the worth of their own language. A slight relaxation of style, an accommodation of common speech and life, can also be traced in the *paḷḷus* and the *kuṟavañcis*, even though these are still essentially highbrow literature that does not give dignity of character to the poor folk and has nothing to do with their daily experience of suffering. Tāyumāṉavar and Paḍikkāsu seem to be the poets of the age, and though that does not speak much for its achievement, there is good augury for the future, for, in the ballads the quality of genuine poetry is not extinct, and with the introduction of printing, and prospects of literacy for the people, and also a stable government, we begin in the British era at least with hopes for a finer literary expression of the people that shall be their very own.

VIII. THE MODERN PERIOD

(1800 A.D. — 1960 A.D.)

1. Background

WITH THE beginning of the nineteenth century, the British had established a stable government in India. They took care not to tamper with the religions of India, and Queen Victoria's proclamation after the Sepoy Mutiny made their attitude more explicit. Yet their presence in the background was a decided check on caste-fanaticism. In Tamilnad, political power had been quite as much responsible for the enforcing of caste-gradation as religious conceptions, and the British government placed the so-called higher castes in a position in which they were unable to do much besides the canvassing of public opinion by references to religion and culture.

A direct and successful offensive against social evils was the host of schools set up by missionary societies, mainly Protestant, through which the public saw a way to literacy and free-thinking. In their wake came government schools and also private schools run by local patronage with government aid, of course, on the western model. Text-books were written by the missionaries in Tamil, on history and other subjects, and the presses were a substantial reinforcement to the work of the schools, introducing for the first time magazines and periodicals, mainly religious, for the benefit of the reading public. In Madras a Society was organised by Ellis and other Englishmen for the editing of Tamil classics.

A second tremendous influence was the attempt of these same missionaries to spread Christianity. The free and liberal ideas of Protestantism, which demand

that each man think out for himself the vital problems of his relationship with God and man, spread in the country like yeast through the dough, leavening the thoughts of the people. Indirectly the great Reformation Movement of Europe was thus casting its spell on Indian thought and life. With such a religion in the background it became necessary for the already existing religions to rethink their position. Controversy led to controversy, and if much good feeling was not promoted by this among the different religions, at least bad Tamil prose was set going with a swing. For the ground was fertile for prose. Here men of ordinary talents could quarrel and argue and come to an understanding or misunderstanding, without the need to fly to the dizzy heights of poetry.

A third and hardly less powerful influence was the sudden switch-over from Tamil to English in education, introduced by Macaulay and the British government. This, one must say, badly arrested the new-found progress of Tamil. As in the Vijayanagar period Tamil had become secondary to Sanskrit and even Telugu, so now in the British period Tamil became secondary to English and lost the promise of recoupment given by the Christian missionaries. Now even the missionaries were cut off from the treasures of the Tamil language, and the few missionaries who had learned just enough of Tamil to point out its greatness to the Tamils were men who actually went out of their way to do it. English meant education for the elite, and this was once again a set back for the Tamil language, because, those who benefited by English education, were mainly the Brahmins, a few other privileged Hindu communities and Christian converts, and none of these sections cared very much at first for Tamil, since English education showed them the way to the good things of life. But English was coming to mean more things.

It unified the different parts of India, a thing unknown in history so far, and worked up a common understanding among the elite of all the states, who were thus privileged to become the leaders of the new nation in and after the Freedom Movement that was shortly to follow. For English education, unlike Sanskrit education, led the leaders to realise the dignity of the individual in the nation.

The Freedom Movement was popularised in Tamilnad by many forces, Subramaṇia Bhārati's songs among them, but what chiefly appealed to the people was the hope of real freedom held out by the leaders, namely freedom from foreign rule, from caste bondage, and from economic oppression. Gandhiji captivated the Tamil imagination as the imagination of Indians elsewhere, by appealing to the people's love of this three-fold freedom, and woman also regained her lost dignity by the part she played in the movement. But all this meant for the Tamils, as for other Indians, a vast literary activity.

It remains to be observed, however, that the fruits of freedom were not made fully available to the Tamils upon obtaining independence, for they had been through too long a period of servitude. The hold of the temples having been stronger in Tamilnad than in other parts of the country, it naturally meant a further struggle to be freed from the corruptions of society. This struggle actually began in the last phase of the Freedom Movement itself in the Tamil country and took shape in parties like the Self-respect Movement. This movement is allied closely to the language issue over which there is so much unrest in Tamilnad, and is reflected in the literary trends of the twentieth century.

2. Irāmaliṅgar and Traditional Poets

Of the poets of the modern period, the first name that stands out is Irāmaliṅga Suvāmihaḷ (1823-74). He was a Śaivite. But his Śaivism is markedly different from the Śaivism of Māṇikka-vāsahar, to whom *bhakti* is practically everything. Irāmaliṅga Suvāmihaḷ combined with that the emphasis on *saṉmārga* or the good life. In this he is more like Tāyumāṉavar than the Nāyaṉārs. His approach to Śaivism is partly traditional and partly original. For him, 'God is the mountain that can be felt in the handful that is love', not merely love to God but love to all life. He was also the champion of *samarasam* or the unity of religions, but he seems to indicate only the Hindu religions.

He is aware of his own limitations. He says, 'I am evil through my race ... evil in character; worse than the small worm that breeds in dung; ... far smaller than the infant that sobs and chokes in the dark room without a light'.[1] Again, he says, 'I do not know the medicine nor the magic ... I do not know to pull out the cruel roots of ego ... Like the fruit of a poison tree I am ripe with desire. ..'[2] I do not know to be free from the torture of caste and creed. I do not know how to avoid dabbling in the marsh of custom'.[3]

Irāmaliṅga Suvāmihaḷ affords an interesting study in language. The great majority of lines in *Tiruvaḍi-p-puhaḻcci* of *Mudal Tirumuṟai* are plainly in any language but Tamil. The letters are Tamil, but the vocabulary is Sanskrit. The passage is aristocratic, unreadable and unintelligible. It must be remembered that the

[1] *Tirumuṟai* VI, *Āṟṟāmai*, ii, 1-2.
[2] Ibid. *Muṟaiyīḍu*, i, 1-2.
[3] Ibid, 7.

Tamil alphabet does not accommodate all Sanskrit sounds, and that the difference between Tamil and Sanskrit is more than that between English and German. Whatever these words might be, when given their full original sound-values, they are insufferable in the Tamil garb. But when Irāmaliṅga Suvāmihaḷ handles Tamil words he seems to have the golden touch. If his verse is Tamil, it is poetry characterised by sweetness, clarity and charm.

A lyrical gift is inborn in him. Almost without his knowledge some of his verses seem to be lifted into the refrain. His *veṇṇilā* stanzas[1], verses addressed to the moon about Śiva, are the most beautiful of their kind, though they have been imitated by later poets. 'Āḍavārīr, eṉṉōḍāḍa vārīr'[2] and 'āḍiya pādam, maṉṟāḍiya pādam'[3] are well-known among his dulcet songs. It remains now for us to give a rough translation of two of his beautiful stanzas, in his prayer for *saṉmārga* or the good life:

'My Father, I pray Thee; deign to hear my prayer;
Grant that I show love to all dear life;
That I may go all over the world, in every birth and everywhere,
My Author, to speak of the fame of Thy grace;
That Thou bestow the light of graciousness,
That the pure Śaivamārga flourish and grow;
If I should but err, it is for Thee to forgive;
And Master, I also ask for the state of never being parted from Thee'[4].

'My Brother, I pray Thee; deign to hear my prayer;
That I acquire the peerless form that cannot be destroyed;

[1] *Tirumuṟai*, II. [2] *Tirumuṟai*, VI. [3] Ibid.
[4] Ibid, *Sutta-saṉmārkka-vēṇḍuhōḷ*, 1.

That I rejoice by looking on Thee everywhere;
That I may sing my every song of Thee;
That I might dance in my ecstatic joy;
That all the lives be healed of dire grief;
And I would also pray to live and never be parted from Thee'.[1]

The voluminous writings of Irāmaliṅga Suvāmihaḷ have been collected in the work called *Tiru-aruṭpā* or the Holy Verses of Grace. Āṟumuha Nāvalar of Jaffna objected to his work being called by such a presumptuous name.[2] Today, however, Irāmaliṅga-Suvāmihaḷ's work is indeed accepted as *Tiru-aruṭpā* by the Tamil Śaivites, and by many non-Śaivites as well. His prose is far too ornate to be much to the purpose.

Mahāvidvāṉ Mīṉakshisundaram Piḷḷai (1815-1876) is a very great personality. It is not because he was the most facile and prolific writer of verse that the Tamil language has known. It is because of the influence that emanated from him and drew a charmed circle round him into which was gathered as splendid a group of scholars as that which was round Dr. Johnson. He was a poet of the *mutts* and his poems have the *mutt* stamp on them. It is said that he would tire out his students by dictating verses extempore. There is no room here even for a list of his works[3], but his is a name that will be remembered with gratitude and affection, for he was the honoured *guru* of Dr. Swāmināṭha Aiyar, who played an important role in the Tamil Renaissance Movement.

Though Henry Albert Krishṇa Piḷḷai (1827—1900) does not come among the major poets of the period, he

[1] *Tirumuṟai, VI, Sutta-saṉmārkka-vēṇḍuhōḷ*, 3.
[2] Suttānanda Bhāratiyār, *Nāvalar Perumāṉ*, pp. 205-207.
[3] Sixteen *purāṇas*, nine *piḷḷai-t-tamiḻs*, eleven *andādis* etc.

deserves consideration here since he occupies the first place among Christian poets. He was a convert from Vaishṇavism and his chief contribution to Tamil literature is *Irakshaṇiya Yātriham* or the *Pilgrim's Progress*. He has imitated Kamban and has used plenty of Sanskrit, and the work by no means reflects the childlike charm of the English original, but yet it is pleasant reading, at times really musical, and is the best Christian poetical work in Tamil. He has also attempted Christian hymns[1] on the *Dēvāram* model.

3. Bhārati and Related Poets

Subramaṇia Bhārati (1882-1921) is one of the Tamil poets with a nation-wide recognition. The recognition is just, for he is the only Tamil poet of consequence who has striven to bring to the Tamils a sense of national unity. He has used the Tamils' love of their language to direct them to a love, not merely of Tamilnad, but the whole of India.

He is one of the major landmarks of Tamil literature. It was high time for Tamil to be released from the clutches of *purāṇas* and minor *prabandhas*, and come to a common-sense outlook on life which could be shared by the common people. The best in Bhārati brought that. The Tamils thus found a new epoch of poetry opened up by a poet who breathed of freedom and whose breath carried fire with it. Yet he did not spurn the past, but demanded that the Tamils should recognize the greatness of their language, and also add their original contribution to it.

It must be remarked here that Bhārati was a Brahmin who was heroic enough to fight against Brahminism. He even dared to cry down the *smritis*, as a 'trap', since

[1] *Irakshaṇiya Maṉōharam.*

they discriminate between Brahmin and non-Brahmin in law. It is no wonder that he endeared himself to the Tamils and made them feel that he was one with them and of them. Nor is it any wonder that his vehement attacks on caste-gradations are today toned down as far as possible.

Bhārati's prose[1] is vigorous and direct, and is one stride ahead of the prose of his day. Yet by itself it could not have ensured him an immortality. As for his verse, it is strange that modern attempts are being made to emphasize the value of his mystical and religious writings, which nobody really cared for during his lifetime. At any rate his religious ideas expressed in these are far from clear to us.

But his real achievement is what was recognized during the Freedom Movement. Passionate outpourings of a heart thirsting for freedom; the simple delight in the eternal graces of childhood and young womanhood; the recognition of some of the permanent and universal values of life: it is these that ensure immortality to Bhārati's lyrics. The divine spark is here, and to read a lyric of his is to recognize it as genuine poetry. His *Kuyil-pāṭṭu* or the Song of the Cuckoo is a lovely fantasy, the exercise of a true poet in an idle mood with his passion spent. The best in Bhārati is in the lyrics[2] and his *Kuyil-pāṭṭu*, and it is no negligible achievement. But when Bhārati is made a poet of national importance in India, we might also mention that he is not by any means among the Tamil giants. Yet he has certainly done more for the Tamils as a shaping and guiding force than for instance, Iḷaṅgo or Kamban̲, and he is also one of the biggest luminaries of the twentieth century.

[1] Collected in three works, *Bhārati Vasan̲am*, *Bhārati Kaṭṭuraihaḷ* and *Bhārati Tamiḻ*.

[2] *Tēsīya Kīdaṅgaḷ*, *Kaṇṇan̲ Pāṭṭu* etc.

Bhārati began as a court-poet at Eṭṭaiyāpuram, then he served as a teacher for some time and finally he was paper-editor. His part in the Freedom Movement led him through many vicissitudes. Like many a poet, he lived and died in comparative poverty.

One of Bhārati's songs of freedom is given here in translation:

'Will not our thirst for freedom be allayed?
Will glamour of our servitude ne'er fade?
When will our Mother's fetters break? O when
Our griefs subside to nothingness again?
Thou, who camest on that fatal day
To cause the Bharat war, and art the stay
Of Aryan blood! Art thou content that we
Perish without thy arm of victory?

Wilt thou apportion to thy serfs, of these
The bread of sorrow, famine and disease?
We cry for mercy; wilt thou answer nay?
O should a mother cast her babe away?
Art thou not duty-bound to lend us strength?
Thy Dharma, is it all forgot at length?
Thou gem of heroes, king of the Aryan race,
Who killed the demons, listen; give us grace'.[1]

Of the host of poets who came in Bhārati's wake, by far the most outstanding name is Bhārati-dāsaṉ, but since he is a living personality he does not come within our present scope. We have, however, to glance at the works of Kavimaṇi Dēsikavināyagam Piḷḷai who passed away in 1954. He was a genuine poet, and he wrote in the

[1] *Bhāratiyār Kavidaihaḷ* (Sakti Kāriyālayam edit. 1957), I, 28.

simplest and most flowing language possible. He attempted adaptations from English, and his views appear to be Bhārati's. His achievement, however, does not rank high in the literature of power, since it is wanting in imagination and force. Yet, he is likely to be remembered for ever by some of the beautifully simple poems he has written for children. In this field, sadly neglected by previous poets, his 'tōṭṭattil mēyudu veḷḷai-p-pasu' is a perfect little masterpiece. Another original contribution of his is a satire[1] on the matriarchal system among the Veḷḷāḷa community in Nāñcināḍ. He had a command of the *veṇbā* and some of his *veṇbās*, like those on his eczema, are exquisite in form and sentiment.

Of the latest trends in poetry which are generally superficial, one observes the tendency to write free-verse, which seems to suit satire and the spirit of frustration rather well. We are rather surprised to note this measure of success for free-verse in an unaccented language like Tamil. Not only in verse-form but also in thought-content English influence is coming to be felt more and more in Tamil poetry.

4. Drama

After the poetry we pass on to the dramatic literature of the period. Tamil operas like *kuṟavañci*, *paḷḷu* and *noṇḍi-nāḍaham* were already popular. Then English education brought Shakespeare within reach of the university man. So we find now attempts in Tamil to dramatise stories in verse. It was thus that Prof. Sundaram Piḷḷai wrote his *Maṉōṉmaṇīyam*. The theme is from Lytton's *Secret Way*. The author has tried to bring into it the requirements of a Tamil epic, and he did

[1] *Marumakkaḷ-vaḻi Māṉmiyam.*

not mean it to be acted. The popularity of *Maṇōṉmaṇīyam* can be inferred from the number of its imitations in this age. Yet it hardly justifies its popularity. It is in archaic style, crammed with proverbs and philosophy, and its characters, except perhaps Vāṇi, are not powerful. Its real redeeming feature is the poetry into which it occasionally kindles, as in the ballad of Śivakāmi and Vāṇi's song. There is genuine poetic feeling in the invocation to the Tamil muse. We have, therefore, more reason to include *Maṇōṉmaṇīyam* in poetry than in drama. *Maṇōṉmaṇīyam* has been followed up by a formidable array of plays both in prose and verse, though we need not mention any of the dramatists except Sambanda Mudaliyar who has written more than eighty plays some of which are quite presentable on the stage. At any rate thought in this field was stimulated, as evident from the admirable book *Madaṅgasūḷāmaṇi* by Swāmi Vipulāṉandar. In the development of this thought Tamil is indebted to Sanskrit also. Real drama in Tamil is but in the making, though there seems to be good promise in some of the latest films and plays in Tamil. Yet the Tamils have not yet had a dramatist with anything like the dramatic sense of their greatest poet.

5. Musical Compositions

This is the age of renaissance in Tamil music also. Many Tamil *kīrttaṉais* were composed in competition with Telugu. Of the numberless musical composers of this age, by far the greatest name is Gōpāla-krishṇa Bhārati, a Brahmin, whose Nandaṉār songs are the most touching collection of songs that were ever sung in Tamil. It is all about the longing of the poor Paṟaya serf to see Śiva in the temple, and the way the objections

of his Brahmin overlord are overruled. Songs like 'varuhalāmō aiyā!' meaning 'May I come in Lord?' and 'vaḻimaṟaittirukkudē!' meaning 'Alas! the way is blocked!' brings tears to our eyes. *Sarva-samaya-samarasa-k-kīrttaṉaihaḷ* of Vēdanāyaham Piḷḷai, whom we have yet to consider as a prose writer, is also popular, being a collection of songs in the ethical strain and having a genuine literary value. One reason for its popularity is that it bears directly on no particular religion, and though arising from his Christian life, is useful to people of all sects. A few of the songs, though not all, by Vēdanāyaham Sāstriyār are very beautiful as musical compositions, though, being Christian lyrics, they are not generally known, and even among the Christian congregation they have been pulled out of shape. One more name to be mentioned in this group is Lakshmaṇa Piḷḷai of Trivandrum. Most of his songs are in the strain of Vēdanāyaham Piḷḷai's and certainly deserve to be better known than they are at present. Some at least are classical and remind one of Tyāgarāja. Several of the composers were musicians themselves, and we find that in this age interest in music had been widely stimulated in Tamilnad. Abraham Paṇḍidar and Swāmi Vipulāṉandar have both of them left voluminous research works on the subject of ancient Tamil music. But we cannot say that these books have changed existing musical trends or have helped in any way the revival of ancient Dravidian music, recorded in Sangam works and *Silappadihāram*. That seems to have been changed under Aryan influence from the day that it passed into the custody of the temples. In the main the result of the musical renaissance was that the singers accepted Tamil musical compositions along with Telugu ones.

6. Prose Writers

We are dealing with an age in which the prose writers have achieved real consequence. But to think of Tamil prose is to remember the pioneer works of Europeans, especially the Christian missionaries. It was not what they personally wrote that mattered so much as what they induced others to write. It was they who first made the writing of Tamil prose as serious a concern as the writing of Tamil poetry. Dr. Caldwell and the Rev. Pope, as well as Ellis, wrote prose, and their love and study of the language served to raise the status of Tamil in the eyes of the world. Religious controversies were stimulated, and Āṟumuha Nāvalar comes to be recognized as a prose writer mainly in the field of religion. And then Protestantism meant also the translation of the Bible. It is most unfortunate that the Tamil version of the Bible is in stilted and un-idiomatic Tamil, yet it also must have contributed to the growth of Tamil prose. Perhaps in Āṟumuha Nāvalar's version of the Bible one could have expected better Tamil though not sufficient sympathy. Of course, another great formative influence in Tamil prose was English education, which brought a vast range of fiction, biography, essays and criticism within reach of the university man. One observes that early Tamil prose is packed with Sanskrit words. The Europeans who started the tradition had found their access to the language mainly with the help of Brahmin scholars, and the *mutt* scholars who took up the tradition, though they were mostly not Brahmins, still regarded Sanskrit and Tamil with equal affection. Naturally, those who came within the sphere of Brahmin or *mutt* influence showed a pre-disposition for Sanskrit. But even here we notice a reaction setting in, and with it the beginnings of the purist school of Tamil.

Āṟumuha Nāvalar of Jaffna is outstanding among the early prose writers besides being a good editor. The incentive for his writing seems to have been the religious zeal of the Christian missionaries which provoked him to an attitude of defence. The controversies in which Āṟumuha Nāvalar and the Christian priests indulged often seem childish, and if the former makes furious passes, the complacency and superior airs of the latter in these controversies must be acknowledged as unjustifiable and provoking. Anyway his religious enthusiasm was powerful enough to encourage in Āṟumuha Nāvalar a stream of prose, not bad Tamil prose, tolerably free from Sanskrit and expressive. He has also narrated *purāṇic* stories in prose, and his narratives are not dull. He was a great force in Śaivite circles of Tamil scholars.

Munsiff Vēdanāyaham Piḷḷai is remembered as the innovator of fiction in Tamil, and his direct stimulus was his English education. His *Piradāba Mudaliyār* was a very popular romance in its day. Intrinsically his novels are loose in structure, crammed with anecdotes and jokes, tending to improbabilities, and will not stand scrutiny as novels. The ethical note is predominant, and the author makes his plea also for social reforms such as the education of women. His views are very modern. The prose, though not without the ornateness of early Tamil prose, is still natural and readable. Vēdanāyaham Piḷḷai belongs to a circle of Tamil scholars and enthusiasts of the time, and commanded much esteem through his genial personality and tolerant attitude to other religions.

Vīrāsāmi Cheṭṭiyār has written some essays and narrated some anecdotes from popular tradition and otherwise about the ancient poets. His collection known as *Vinōda-rasa-mañcari* commanded a wide audience.

V. V. S. Aiyar is more important for what he has done to Tamil than for his Tamil works. He was a good critic in Tamil, and he was the first to have the confidence to compare Kamban with Homer and Shakespeare, and he even had the daring to show openly in an English study how Kamban had bettered Vālmīki. He attempts a synthetic approach to criticism in Tamil which is an innovation in the language. He has also written biographies and a collection of short stories. Like many of the Tamil Brahmins during the Freedom Movement, he too was free from caste-prejudice and showed an open and generous mind.

An outstanding Tamil enthusiast of this age was Sūriya Nārāyaṇa Sāstri, a Brahmin who even changed his Sanskrit name to its Tamil form Paridi-māl-kalaiñan. His love of Tamil amounts to a religion if not to a frenzy. He has felt the needs of Tamil and tried his best to cover them. He advocated several reforms in Tamil. Though he was a versatile writer, he shall be remembered by the Tamils with affection more for his personality and his service than for literary merit which after all does not come at call. He even took sides with Tamil against the arrogance of the Sanskritists like a certain Nakkīrar of tradition.

Two novelists, Rājam Aiyar and Mādavaiya, both Brahmins, make the next step in the development of the novel. Rājam Aiyar's *Kamalāmbāḷ Sarittiram* and Mādavaiya's *Padmāvadi Sarittiram* are social novels that are still worth the reading. There is a definite attempt at characterisation and artistry, and the prose also is more than readable.

Maṟaimalai Aḍihaḷ is a really big name in Tamil prose. His original name was Swāmi Vēdāchalam, but the Sanskrit name was discarded out of his Tamil zeal. He was

the first to stress the need to cultivate a chaste prose style —which meant, for him, freedom from Sanskrit. His prose thus shows a wilful avoidance of Sanskrit words, but though this is a mark of the later pedantic style, Maṟaimalai Aḍihaḷ's prose is still not pedant's prose, for the reason that he is a man of thought, though all his thinking does not prevent him from strong prejudice. The world to him is built on Tamil and Śaivism.

Hardly any field of thought is left unexplored by him. He deals with science, with hypnotism, with religion. He applies his knowledge of English criticism to a study of *Mullai-p-pāṭṭu* and *Paṭṭiṉa-p-pālai*. He has written novels, imaginary letters, essays and verse. His achievement is not merely a real stimulus to Tamil prose. It is good prose in itself. Only we might find ourselves puzzled by what he has to say. For instance he even claims the *Upanishads* as Dravidian thought. It sounds, however, but as a natural reaction to the fantastic claims of the Sanskritists who generally forget the debt that Sanskrit owes to Tamil both in vocabulary and ideas.

Dr. Swāmināṭha Aiyar was an indefatigable scholar and he has edited numerous Tamil works including the Sangam classics. It must be remembered that these editions were based on the records of the cadjan leaves, and several of them might have passed out of existence but for his work. Though he did not know English, it is remarkable that his editions are modelled on the best English editions, complete with glossary and different readings of the text. His introductions to the editions are valuable as critical studies.

He was a good prose writer in his own rights. His Tamil makes very pleasing reading. He has left several collections of essays, biographies and an autobiography.

The subjective element adds to the flavour of the essays. One rather feels though, that there is a little too much of himself and his achievements in these. Still, one gets a very fine picture of the charmed circle of Tamil scholars of his time, and social life, particularly of the privileged communities, is also reflected.

Tiru. Vi. Ka, as he is popularly known, is one of the finest gentlemen and social reformers of the time. It is known to us that he commanded great respect and affection. It is of particular interest to us that though he began as an ardent Śaivite he later developed very strong Christian leanings even though he never joined a church. He testifies that to love Christ is to be inspired with His qualities of truth and peace, and that he acquired what he calls Brahminhood through contact with Him. He was also drawn very strongly to Gandhi. His writings are mainly collections of the powerful speeches on social reforms like caste levelling and the uplift of women. He has also written a few substantial works like *Peṇṇiṉ Perumai* and *Maṉida-vāḻkkaiyum Kāndi Aḍihaḷum*. But his best work is his autobiography, which may not be well-planned, but still is very touching and tender at times, and there are even moments of sublimity. His prose is more or less pure Tamil and often very beautiful and a comparison of it with the pure Tamil of the scholastic school reveals that the makers of a language, whether prose or verse, are really the men of vision.

7. Kalki (1899-1954)

Kalki comes after Tiru. Vi. Ka and served his literary apprenticeship in Turu. Vi. Ka's paper. He enjoyed vast popularity during his life as the editor of the widely circulated *Āṉanda-vihaḍaṉ* and *Kalki* magazines, to which he had been contributing, apart from his valuable editorials,

quite a number of stories and interesting articles. He took active part in the Freedom Movement. He was also an art critic, particularly in the field of music.

Kalki's reputation in the future will rest on his prolific novels. Many of these are historical romances, and Kalki being a man with an English education, the influence of Scott on his novels may be imagined. In *Alai Ōsai* he makes the heroine hear the tumult of the waves very much as Dickens makes Lucy hear it. His characterisation is certainly not as sure, or as powerful, as Kamban's. Throughout there is a surfeit of sentimentalism, melodrama, love and romanticism. Yet all this does not take away from the enjoyableness of Kalki's novels.

What is the secret of this enjoyableness? In the first place there is Kalki's style. It is a style with a distinct individuality, a style that is fluent and easily adaptable, now kindling to a genial kindly humour that is never loud, now melting in tenderness and sympathy, and now vibrant with excitement. His style is not free from Sanskrit, yet mostly the Sanskrit is unaggressive and natural, making his style only rich and strong in vocabulary. His style redeems his descriptive passages from the monotony of Scott's and endears even his trivialities to us. It makes tolerable the detailed description of sculpture and dancing in which he indulges. It sparkles in the dialogues of his characters. It is quite probably the best part of his work.

But Kalki's appeal to the masses is very powerful, and on other grounds. The way in which he plays upon the responsiveness to sensational events is admirable. True, sometimes a plot of his appears unreal or impossible, but it is always able to excite. The demands of his magazine might have necessitated this. The need to leave an unfinished story at a moment of suspense to be

picked up in the next issue of the magazine may have led him to cultivate the technique of suspense. The masses are generally greedy for excitement, and he gives them a generous helping of it. So also he seems to have sensed the requirements of a sentimental public in his treatment of love. People take a very kindly interest in love-birds, and the loveliness of love is a very dear subject to Kalki. But he never wallows in dirt of any kind for the fun of it, and we may be thankful for this trait in a writer with such a vast audience. One must mention also his ability in working up an atmosphere in his historical romances, making the dead past come back to life in vivid colours, as in *Sivakāmiyiṉ Sabadam*. Occasionally there is an unforgettable vignette worked out with genuine poetic warmth. The tusker's discovering the body of its royal master and trumpeting its sorrow to the skies, and the young Kalyāṇi's exploding into girlish laughter when the police inspector's hat floated away on the water, hardly belong to the realm of prose.

It is not easy to decide which of Kalki's works is the best. Perhaps *Sivakāmiyiṉ Sabadam* may be considered as his best. But apart from his own considerable achievement, we must remember that Kalki was, and still is, a strong stimulus to others coming after him in the field of Tamil prose and fiction.

8. Pudumai-p-pittaṉ

Now we come to the finest short-story writer in Tamil, namely Pudumai-p-pittaṉ (1948). Others had already refined the short story before him, beginning with V.V.S. Aiyar. Ku. Pa. Rājagōpālaṉ had even been interested in psychological studies. But with Pudumai-p-pittaṉ, the short story achieved a decided status in Tamil literature.

And Pudumai-p-pittaṉ has been recognized as a force in Tamil, who after Kalki commands a considerable audience. But unlike Kalki, his writings are not merely of entertainment value, but probe into the failings of society with ruthless and fearless frankness. Romance pure and beautiful does not come his way. His prose also is like his stories; it is a two edged sword which slashes to left and right in its progress. He does not spare anybody, and since he is almost impelled by a force that is too strong for him his prose is very powerful indeed.

Yet one feels that Pudumai-p-pittaṉ but leaves behind a taste of bitterness, frustration and disgust. All that force in him has been squandered on a destructive process. Men of vision, of the stature of Ruskin, Carlyle and Newman have not appeared in our prose, to build Tamil society and Tamil thought with their inspiration, though it is true that we have had them among our poets. Till they appear in the field of prose, our prose cannot achieve the sweetness, the depth, and the expansiveness of our poetry.

Pudumai-p-pittaṉ has also tried his hand at criticism and comparatively free verse which affords him excellent scope for the satirical vein. It must be said that few Tamil authors have shown as much originality as Pudumai-p-pittaṉ. It is a pity that he died young and almost unrecognized, and also before he could form positive ideals.

9. T. K. C. and Other Prose Writers

T. K. Chidambaranātha Mudaliyār, popularly known as T. K. C, is chiefly known as an ardent and often illuminating exponent of Kambaṉ. He was probably the one to lift Kambaṉ's work from the status of a popular

purāṇa to the dignity of a highly literary work fit to be appreciated by scholars. Kamban, like Shakespeare, could not but have been loved always, but the loud admiration of the critical elite requires a prodding. As Bradley to Shakespeare, so is T. K. C to Kamban. One observes that the poet's faults always manage to escape his eyes, but the poet's merits are sometimes studied with a real critical acumen. Maybe it was T. K. C's contact with English criticism that helped him to analyse the Tamil poet's creative talent, but the fact remains that T. K. C's name will always be found in Kamban's shadow. T. K. C's prose is simple, direct and in the intimate conversational style, and there is an occasional glow of beauty in it which is perhaps reflected from the work of the master that he acknowledges. Along with him should be mentioned his son whose rich promise was cut short by an early death.

Vaiyāpuri Piḷḷai will be remembered as an excellent editor, a diligent research scholar, and a writer of prolific and clear prose. His views have been greatly influenced by English and Sanskrit writers. A scholar of this type, though not versed in English, was M. Rāghava Aiyaṅgār who was also a good prose-writer.

10. Modern Trends

This is an age of prose. In the latest Tamil literature, as in Tamil society, the strongest trends fall under two sharp divisions, pro-Brahminist and anti-Brahminist. It is a most unfortunate, unhappy state of affairs, and it is difficult to decide with whom the major responsibility rests. Now it is not possible to overcome this feeling of antagonism by insisting, as non-Tamils thoughtlessly do, on what is called Indian culture. That is a very

vague word and it can be used to mean many things. No nation can have a sound foundation if a fallacy is at the bottom of it. And when the pro-Brahminists in Tamilnad suggest, as they too often do, that Indian culture all over the country is one, and that you have to look up to Sanskrit for anything worth your while, it is perfectly understandable if the Tamils kick up a row. Sanskrit culture and Sanskrit do mean almost everything worth remembering from the past for the entire extent of the rest of the country, in particular for the aristocrats, but every Indian citizen should understand that this is absolutely not the case with Tamilnad, and that it is his duty to respect the traditions, language and culture of a people who have their right to be different if they choose, and the real basis of whose loyalty to the Indian Union is the marriage-covenant they entered into upon Independence Day. Catch-words like Indian culture, if they are meant to point to Sanskrit, and particularly if they are used by the Brahmins who have exploited it so well in past history, are bound to provoke suspicion and resentment, and the language of resentment is hardly ever the language of common sense or courtesy. The Tamilian is asked to swallow remarks that the best in his heritage is from the Sanskrit, that even Vaḷḷuvar has only translated Manu, Kauṭilya and Vatsyāyana. Would it ever be possible for the language-proud Tamils to accept fiction of this stamp? Indeed the provocation by the Sanskritists, and disbelief in them, are at the root of the anti-Brahmin feeling, and even the opposition to Hindi, which the Tamils rather regard as a sort of Sanskrit, if not a would-be Sanskrit, without its literature.

But on the other hand the anti-Brahminists do succeed in making themselves ridiculous. Theirs at present is a creed of hatred, vengeance and iconoclasm, and they

manage to be very noisy and give the impression of being more in number and more formidable than they really are. Their catch-word is Tamil or Dravidian culture, quite as misleading a term as Indian culture. In the past, Dravidian culture has stood for the importance of the ploughman in society, for absolute social equality, as against the *varṇāsrama* of Aryan civilization. But today the Tamil outlook has come to be identified more or less with the general outlook of Indians, and Tamil culture as such could not have much meaning so long as the caste division of the Aryan system is strictly kept at arm's length, and women are respected in society.

The latest Tamil literature reflects these modern trends only too clearly. On the one hand we have the attractively got-up Brahmin papers with a wide market. They are highly, often deliberately Sanskritised, and they emphasize strongly the Hindu religious elements along with Sanskrit and so-called 'Indian' culture. Disparagement of all other elements is often the under-current. But for the element of humour their is mainly a propaganda value. Counter to this runs the literature of the D. M. K. authors, said to be purist, full of vituperation, stinging and bitter. In the main they are wordy and mannered, and they too are propaganda, often running parallel to the communist authors of whom also there are a few. The absence of faith in life and the beauty of human nature as such, is deplorably pronounced in all sects, even though all sorts of techniques are used. It is interesting to note that all parties use the innocent *Kuṟaḷ* as a sort of delicious bait to catch public opinion. Even groups of writers that maintain no party loyalties, like the scholastic school descended from Maṟaimalai Aḍihaḷ, and the popular and English educated school in the wake of T.K.C, have distinct party inclinations. And in this

mass of conflicting idealogies vested interests also have their game to play.

There is no wonder that criticism does not flourish much in Tamil. In the first place we should remember that absolute intellectual honesty is the prime requisite of sound criticism. The conflict of thoughts and interests in Tamilnad is so heated that the prospect of having anything like a literature of sane, balanced and healthy criticism is as yet very remote. Yet there is evidence that the critical strain is not really absent from the Tamil mind. Ethical literature in Tamil could be gathered into a bewilderingly vast heap, yet the Tamils have no hesitation in pointing to the slender volume of Vaḷḷuvar as their one guide-book. Hindu and non-Hindu alike of the Tamils are affected by the beauty of Vaḷḷuvar's non-religious philosophy. They obstinately believe in the overpowering beauty of their *Rāmāyaṇa*, though a Rākshasa who fought on Rāvaṇā's side is one of the most magnificent heroes of epic literature. Again, in a land where Śaivism is so strong, and epics of all kinds swarm like crocodiles on the Nile, how does every one throw up his hand for the Jain work of Iḷaṅgō's? Or how did the beggar-poetess Avvai keep the love and loyalty of the Tamil people, when all India went after English and Sanskrit as the languages of the aristocrats of the country? Hence there is good hope that when the social balance is fully restored, and every man is entitled to self-respect, the critical faculty will come into full play. Through the ages, Tamil poetry has reflected, in a way that even English poetry has not, the life of a people. Their pulse in health and sickness is felt in the true literary records of their poets. That is the chief beauty of Tamil literature. Some day, we hope the Tamils will themselves be able to recognize fully the worth of these glowing records, and apply to

this literary life the same judgment that their great masters have applied to human life.

11. Conclusion

So, we have followed the course of a people's literary development down the length of about two thousand years. We have not been able to observe the details. We have just mapped, on a very small scale, the course of this majestic flood. We could not see it at its very source, for Time's clouds are heavy over those dizzy crests, but we have seen it leaping out into the fertile plain as a broad life-giving river. When we first see it, we also see a small tributary stream, almost a hesitant trickle, meeting it from the Sanskrit, for the Tamil kings, with characteristic generosity, were already encouraging the Vēdic scholars and priests, along with the Jains and Buddhists. Some of the most finished poems of the world are the outcome of one of the most liberal cultures that could be possible in a monarchy, for on it the *varṇāsrama* had not yet laid its heavy hand. This takes us out of the well-laid-out and fruitful fields of Sangam literature, where the stream is next swelled by another tributary, this time a clearer, stronger one, and this hails distinctly from Sanskrit and Prakrit sources. This cult from the Sanskrit that has made the first truly powerful appeal to the minds of the Tamil people is, strangely enough, not the Vēdic religion, but the religions that arose as a reformation of, and a protest against the Brahminical corruptions of the Vēdic religion. The emphasis on ethics is a new trend really in Tamil life and blends wonderfully with the ancient ideals of fame and generosity, though with respect to woman the Tamils have summarily rejected the Buddhist and Jain attitude.

Still later comes a yet more powerful tributary, this time a really violent one, threatening to change the course of the literature altogether. This is the Vēdic religion which for the first time sweeps into the country with tremendous force, absorbing the native religion, and for the moment putting the Tamilian ideals in real danger of being overwhelmed. Jainism and Buddhism are swept away, not without persecution. The floods soon become unhealthy, being highly emotional, and giving room to casteism, which one cannot deny must come in the wake of any religion which allows superiority to any one caste. The main sweep of the literature after that is a headlong rush from poetry into the labyrinths and caverns of a vague mythology and theology, with the result that clear thinking is lost and society is sadly ruined.

In the next stage there comes a feeble influence, the Muslim influence. But the main stream itself was drying up, and it would have dried up altogether had it not been for two great springs of indigenous thought, namely the *sittars* and the wandering but popular bards. The process of drying up continues down to the British period, when the stream receives a sudden and substantial replenishment through the popularisation of the press and the increase of literacy chiefly through the agency of the Christian missionaries. It is really a myth that the Tamils have attained proficiency in English, for the representatives of the people did not know the English alphabet. Yet the indirect influence of democratic ideals and Christian thought was very strong in re-shaping society. It must be said that Christianity was arrested in Tamilnad chiefly because of the materialism, the westernised ways, and the want of understanding of the so-called Christians, but Christian thought has strongly leavened Tamil literature.

The English influence on Tamil literature is soon likely to vie even with the Sanskrit influence. Let us hope that national trends will not stifle English in Tamilnad, for that would be to close the newly opened windows on the world.

We do not know yet through what vast region the language is to hold its course. With the recognition of its importance in the State, it seems to hold out new hopes. Yet we cannot assess now the changes that are likely to come over it in the near future, with Hindi as the national language. Hindi has to be handled very cautiously in Tamilnad, for where the Tamils are concerned, language has always been a ticklish problem. To touch what might affect their language is to throw a dangerous explosive into their midst. The Tamils have been through much as a people, through prosperity and through adversity. But they have always clung with desperate love to their poets. Their philosophy of life has been alas! too often the saddening philosophy of Avvai. They might give up life, but how could they relegate to a secondary place their very own poetess, who has been more faithful to them in their affliction than their kings? This more or less explains the dread with which the Tamils regard any language that they are asked to take up, without their own free will. And the free will of a people with such a tradition cannot be obtained by emphasizing 'Indian' culture.

What is the future of the Tamil literature? The creative vitality of the people is not extinct. Something really worthwhile may turn up somewhere. It is strange that in many respects, in liberality of outlook, in softness and mellowness of sound, in pliability and adjustability to different purposes, Tamil bears a closer resemblance to English than to Sanskrit. It is not less strange that

the greatest Tamil poet is, in essentials, far more like the greatest English poet than the greatest Sanskrit poet. He has decided once for all the standard by which Tamil creative art shall be measured. Yet not even he has been able to draw the line at which Tamil poetry shall stop, and the end is not yet in sight.

The ancient Tamil poets do have a message for the world. The world may accept it or reject it, but the message is given. Youth, and beauty, and wealth, and valour, are great things. But love, and faith in love, and generosity, and chivalry, are greater. These are some of the things that our poets believed in. They have not much set, standardised, codified, religious philosophy such as you have in Sanskrit. Or if they have, like the Śaiva-siddhānta philosophy, it is of little consequence beside their poetry. Vaḷḷuvar and Avvai are great philosophers; but they are poets first. They sing as they take along with you the march of life; and they lighten the tedium of the journey. The only wonder is that they have been so long unknown to the rest of the world. The watchword on the Tamils' lips had been Fame. Out of faith in that insubstantial thing the Tamils had done incredible things. They were ready to give their heads off their shoulders, if it could buy them their reputation. Indrajit hears of his brother's death and asks, 'Is it my brother who has perished? Is it not my father's fame that has perished?' This is Kamban, but this is the note to which the entire Tamil literature proper is keyed. Alas, for the fallacies that we cherish in our bosoms! It is a dreadful lesson to posterity, to watch the fame of these votaries to Fame float downstream like a bubble into such oblivion as the present.

It seems tolerably easy to predict the future of the Tamil language. Like English, it is now a conglomeration

of words from several sources, and is the richer for it. A considerable percentage of its vocabulary is foreign. More and more foreign words are knocking at the door, from Hindi, Sanskrit, and English. But, of course, they shall be given the garb of Tamil phonetics to wear within the Tamil fold. Now and again, too, quite an unnecessary word is pushed in from the Sanskrit, to elbow out an established Tamil word. For instance, for the word happiness, you have different words in different shades of pure Tamil: 'mahiḻvu', 'kaḷippu', 'iṉbam', and 'uvahai.' They are considered literary words, and are still used in writing, in decided preference to their Sanskrit equivalents. But you meet your friend and courteously enquire of his health. On hearing the expected reply, you answer, not 'mahiḻvu,' but 'sandōsham'! So far as the spoken language is concerned, the four beautiful Tamil words are all but obsolete. How does this happen? Why, because Sanskrit is, slowly but gradually, leavening the language still. Most of the leading Tamil magazines and papers of the day, which every one reads, which every one cannot but read—they are so beautiful, are Brahmin-sponsored, and you could hardly find fault with Brahmins for familiarity with Sanskrit! Naturally, Sanskrit words do float thick and fast into our vocabulary, even though the purist school of Tamil writers is desperately trying to keep them in check. Shall we express regret for this state of affairs? Perhaps, if we think calmly over it, we shall not. The Tamil people have been a generous, extravagantly generous, people. The Tamil language shall be a generous language. What does it matter, if a Tamil word is put by without use and is forgotten? Empires perish and the years go by. Poets die and nobody thinks of them. Who has heard of Kamban among the world poets? Prophets come and

they are killed. Who listens to the voice of Paṭṭiṉattār and the *sittars*? These are things that must be, for such is the way of the world. And so it would be a small matter, if the Tamil language itself changes. It must adapt itself to swiftly changing conditions. We must remember that we cannot speak the language of Tiruvaḷḷuvar, if we are sane in the twentieth century.

Then, what is the position of our beloved Tiruvaḷḷuvar, our Kamban, our Avvai, in the future? Are they to be put by and forgotten, as idle singers of an empty day? Or, shall they still continue to give us their vision and their inspiration? Perhaps; or at least as long as their voices are intelligible. And when the time comes that their voices are not clear, we shall, out of our own crying needs, find among ourselves, our new prophets, our new poets, our new philosophers. For the possibilities of life are indeed unlimited. And man's nature is vast and glorious. And there is that in him, which, when he asks for it, shall arise and fulfil his need. For man is a spark of God. And there is no knowing what He can or will provide. And on the faith of that, we might as well close this book, the saga of a great people and a great literature, and relax.

APPENDICES

SYSTEM OF TRANSLITERATION AND PRONUNCIATION OF TAMIL LETTERS

Vowels

Tamil	Transliteration	Pronunciation (approximate)
அ	a	u in punch
ஆ	ā	a in father
இ	i	i in sit
ஈ	ī	i in clique
உ	u	u in full
ஊ	ū	u in rule
எ	e	e in fed
ஏ	ē	ai in main
ஐ	ai	ai in aisle, but shorter
ஒ	o	o in mobility
ஓ	ō	o in noble
ஔ	au	ow in cow

Consonants

க்	k (in the beginning of a word, after a hard consonant or when in doubles)	as in English
	g (after a nasal)	g in girl
	h (in other places)	same as English

Tamil	Transliteration	Pronunciation (approximate)
ங்	ṅ (before g)	n in singing
ச்	c (when in doubles or after a hard consonant)	ch in chatter
	s (in other places)	s in same
ஞ்	ñ	n in ginger
ட்	ṭ (when in doubles or before a hard consonant)	cerebral, far back in the palate
	ḍ (in all other places)	d in den
ண்	ṇ	n stopped as far back as possible
த்	t (in the beginning of a word or when in doubles)	Dentals purer than English dentals
	d (in other places)	
ந்	n	dental nasal
ப்	p (in the beginning of a word or when in doubles)	as in English
	b (in other places)	as in English
ம்	m	as in English
ய்	y	as in English
ர்	r	as in English when soft
ல்	l	as in English
வ்	v	as in English, but not so firm.

Tamil	Transliteration	Pronunciation (approximate)
ழ்	ḷ	r pronounced with the tongue as far back in the throat as possible
ள்	ḷ	l pronounced by the palate
ற்	ṟ	a rolling r; before a hard consonant t
ன்	ṉ	n as in sin

Transliteration of Sanskrit letters

(N.B. Sanskrit words unless they have become modified by long Tamil usage, are transliterated according to Sanskrit pronunciation.)

क-k	ख-kh	ग-g	घ-gh	ङ-ṅ
च-ch	छ-chh	ज-j	झ-jh	ञ-ñ
ट-ṭ	ठ-ṭh	ड-ḍ	ढ-ḍh	ण-ṇ
त-t	थ-th	द-d	ध-dh	न-n
प-p	फ-ph	ब-b	भ-bh	म-m
य-y	र-r	ल-l	व-v	
श-ś	ष-sh	स-s	ह-h	
मृ-ṛi	.-ṁ	:-ḥ		

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